

# Gender and Sexuality in South African Music



Edited by  
Chris Walton & Stephanus Muller



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Chris Walton  
&  
Stephanus Muller



This book is dedicated with gratitude to the staff of the Music Library of the University of Pretoria:  
Isobel Oosthuizen, Gertrud Meyer and Marie Stals

*Gender and Sexuality in South African Music*

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# INTRODUCTION

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During the past two decades, the study of sexuality and gender in music has become a decidedly mainstream activity. To be sure, music has long been obviously and intimately involved in matters pertaining to relations, both sexual and otherwise, between and amongst the sexes. Its use in courtship is the one that perhaps comes first to mind, this use being probably as old as music itself. But music's uniquely non-representational, yet deeply metaphorical properties have also allowed composers greater freedom to express desire – and its frustrations and fulfilments – more openly than other arts would commonly allow. Only a particularly prudish, Calvinist moralist in severe denial could believe that there is no sexual intent in works ranging from Orlando Gibbons's *Silver Swan* (who, 'when death approach'd, unlock'd her silent throat'), Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* with its prolonged climactics, to Chuck Berry's exhortation to 'play with [his] ding-a-ling' or the Beatles' questioning 'Why don't we do it in the road?'. This confluence of music and the biological imperative should not surprise us. If we accept as a given that music, being a product of human creativity, cannot but reflect the many facets of the human condition, then sexuality and gender – two inextricably linked, undeniable determinants of human behaviour and relationships – must have a major impact both on the music we write, perform and listen to, and on the way we write it, perform it and listen to it.

Following the lead of literary theorists and others, musicologists began in the last quarter of the twentieth century to explore not just the obvious musical representations of sexual climax that became common in the nineteenth century, and of which Isolde's *Liebestod* is the most famous example, but to venture beyond the orgasm, as it were, to investigate the complex ways in which constructions of gender and sexuality have throughout history impinged upon the musical artefact and the acts of its creation and distribution. There have indeed since been succulent fruits plucked from the musico-historical tree, be it in the guise of discussions of gendered form ('feminine endings' and the like),<sup>1</sup> or of the role of gender hierarchies in the activities of composer and performer. 'Gay' musicology has also positively thrust itself into the forefront of scholarship, and not just in the study of openly homosexual composers such as Benjamin Britten. While some still bemoan the manner in which formerly lovable figures such as Franz Schubert have now been 'outed' as supposed pederasts,<sup>2</sup> and while the potential for abuse and exaggeration is undeniable (it can only be a matter of time before Saint Cecilia herself is deconstructed as a myth of male transsexual desire in which her organ features large), there can be no doubt that – be it on the straight and narrow or the queer and wide – musicology today undoubtedly offers something up everyone's alley, albeit further up it than might be comfortable for some.

While gender studies are by no means foreign to South Africa today, these developments have had little impact on musical scholarship in this country. Musicologically speaking: in South Africa, sex is in its infancy. This is in some ways an odd fact, for South African society was for most of the second half of the twentieth century probably even more obsessed with sex than was the rest of the world. While one cannot ignore the economic and other reasons for apartheid, that system was, in a very fundamental sense, about sex. Its aim was

to prevent miscegenation, the mixing of races – which is a roundabout way of saying it was intended to prevent people who were not white from having sex with people who were. This horror of interracial sex even culminated in the complete denial by the white, nationalist establishment that the Afrikaans-speaking, Coloured community of the Western Cape might possibly be the result of congress between indigenous peoples and the colonizing Europeans. However, as J.M. Coetzee has written in his study of censorship, apartheid was in fact less concerned with preventing mixed-race sex than with preventing white women from having sex with non-white men.<sup>3</sup> When one studies the texts by the early apartheid theorists to which Coetzee refers (such as those by Geoffrey Cronjé), these (male) writers in fact return again and again, and again and again, to their horror of ‘mixing the races’ to such an extent that one suspects that their principal fear is not that their womenfolk might *have* sexual intercourse with black men, but that they might *enjoy* it. Of course, this horrified fascination with black, male sexuality undoubtedly also has a strong homoerotic element, with repulsion and desire merging imperceptibly. This particularly paranoid aspect of apartheid theory has already been dealt with extensively by others, and is not our principal concern here. Nor can one reduce a complex political, economic and social system of repression only to feelings of sexual envy on the part of a genitally-disadvantaged white minority too scared to come out of the closet. And, of course, the fear of sex in South Africa was not just limited to the possibility of interracial coitus. In certain sections of society, not least in certain universities, the act of dancing was quite forbidden amongst the white population – a result of the perfectly sensible realization that music is, in the context of adolescent dance, a ritualised means of finding a compatible member of the opposite sex with whom one might go forth and multiply (though the implicit notion that dance might lead to unbridled sexual pleasure is perhaps little more than a repressed fantasy on the part of the representatives of white authority).

If one accepts, as posited above, that music reflects the human condition, a condition of which the sexual impulse is an integral part, then we must surely ask: how is music affected in a society that is so terrified of that natural impulse that it attempts to regulate it, to forbid it, to deny in some circumstances its very existence? These are some of the issues that the organizers of the conference ‘Gender and Sexuality in South African Music’ wished to confront head-on at the University of Pretoria in August 2003. The conference was made possible by financial assistance from the Travelling Institute for Music Research of the National Research Foundation of South Africa, and was the first of its kind to take place in this country. There are in fact many perplexing issues specific to South Africa that cry out to be investigated. There is, for example, the fact that some white, homosexual composers played a leading role in the Afrikaner establishment in the 1960s and ’70s. On the one hand, the *macho*, homophobic society in which they lived meant that they were outsiders; and yet on the other hand, at least one of those composers wrote cantatas glorifying the very society that deemed him to be perverse. But our aim was not just to explore the biographies of gay Afrikaner composers and their context in society, but to deal with general issues of sexuality and gender in popular, indigenous and art music. To what extent can gendered and sexualised hierarchies be discerned in South African music and music-making, both in the field of Western art music and in indigenous knowledge systems? To what extent has music been used here to support or subvert gendered societal structures? Between, say, the extremes of Hubert du Plessis’s *Suid-Afrika - Nag en Daeraad* and *Sarafina* – the one a triumphantly masculine, nationalist

cantata by a gay composer, the other a musical tale of a black girl coping with both puberty and racial oppression – between these two, there lie hitherto unexplored zones, erogenous and otherwise, that it is our task as musicologists to explore. While the ambitious scope of our conference prevented us from engaging in anything more than a surface excavation of our chosen field, we hope that its example might encourage and inspire others to dig deeper and longer, and expose to the light of day what has too long been hidden in the murky mires of recent history.

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<sup>1</sup> This being the title of Susan McClary's well-known book on gender in music. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Lawrence Kramer's *Franz Schubert: Sexuality, Subjectivity, Song*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> See the chapter 'Apartheid Thinking', in J.M. Coetzee: *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.



## THANKS

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# BLACK MUSICALITY IN COLONIAL SOUTH AFRICA: A DISCOURSE OF ALTERITIES

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Grant Olwage

There are numerous refrains in the colonial discourse on black South Africa. ‘Musicality’ is one.<sup>1</sup> For all the white writer’s revulsion at black musical practices, he – and, importantly, the sex of the authorial subject was almost always male – could not but help note the sheer amount of black musicking in the colonies. At times, so it seemed, only the limits of human endurance could put pay to ‘primitive’ singing-dancing. As the early comparative musicologist and author of *Primitive Music*, Richard Wallaschek, observed: ‘it has ... been demonstrated by ethnological research that to bring about bodily fatigue through the manifestation of energy in a perpetually-increasing ratio up to the last degree of lassitude is an indispensable feature of primitive art.’<sup>2</sup> In the logic of nineteenth-century biological racism, quantity was quality, and blacks were innately musical. In the Cape Colony the trope of black musicality extended from accounts of precolonial musicking to those of colonial performance, when from the last quarter of the nineteenth century white writers more typically encountered black mission station choralism. To sample only notable literary opinion: for Anthony Trollope, on a whirlwind tour of the eastern Cape missions, the ‘singing of hymns [was] a thoroughly Kafir accomplishment’; and for the colonial poet Francis Carey Slater, reflecting on his childhood spent at the Lovedale mission in the eastern Cape, the ‘Natives’ were ‘*born choristers*’.<sup>3</sup> So widespread was the fame of mission musicking that the mission put out public disclaimers that its students were not spending all their time singing hymns.<sup>4</sup>

Like all colonial myths of alterity, black musicality had its ‘other’ back ‘home’, in the ‘deplorably unmusical’ Englishman; again, I stress the gender of the noun stem. What commentators diagnosed as the Englishman’s singing ‘*vis inertiae*’ seemed to testify to a pan-Victorian problem.<sup>5</sup> For congregational singing, for instance, the educationalist and church musician John Spencer Curwen noted that ‘the majority of the men stand silent, and we must charitably suppose them to be making melody in their hearts.’<sup>6</sup> It ‘is the *man’s* voice that we want’, implored *The Parish Choir*. ‘Women and children do sing already; but the congregational chorus wants the body, volume, and richness, which the man’s voice alone can give.’<sup>7</sup>

Popular choralism too became an increasingly non-male space as the century progressed.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the Victorian era, singing in a choir was the one form of ‘respectable’ music-making for women that existed outside the parlour; it was one of the few public leisure activities available to women. As the demands by women for leisure participation increased, the number of women in choral societies and church choirs rose dramatically from the early to late Victorian periods. The structural make-up of the choir altered in the process. Before, altos were men and the highest part was given to boys. By the end of the century the contralto had replaced the male alto and sopranos were edging out boy trebles. It was at this time that the shortage of male singers and the numerical dominance of sopranos became a long-term

reality of choral demographics.<sup>9</sup> As the *Magazine of Music* announced: it was ‘emphatically the age of Woman – with a capital letter’, and if ‘the sex’ was ‘pushing its way into every department of life and work which ha[d] hitherto been regarded as the exclusive property of the male’, the choir too had long ceased to be a male-dominated domain.<sup>10</sup>

Accompanying women’s move into the choir was a parallel discursive move that represented Victorian choral music as feminine. Exemplary of this strategy is a series of essays on ‘Victorian Music’, penned on the occasion of the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897 by Joseph Bennett, then editor of *The Musical Times*. The sections on church, or choral, music are basically a chronological history of its composers. At one point, Bennett interrupts this narrative to give a synopsis of it, at the same time laying bare his method:

the reader will be asked to observe further movement in the direction of what, on the score of grace and sentiment, may be called femininity and, necessarily, an equal removal from masculinity as represented by qualities of intellect, science, and strength. This is the tendency of the age in all art, and Church music cannot hope to escape, notwithstanding its strong traditions.<sup>11</sup>

Those ‘manly’ traditions became the measure from which church music’s increasing feminisation was charted: the music of successive generations of composers was progressively ‘emasculate’, until, arriving at the late Victorian present, cases of ‘decadence’ were found.<sup>12</sup> If Bennett concluded that ‘this branch of the art in England [was] sound’, it was only because he reclaimed the high Victorian composers as part masculine. John Stainer, for one, while commonly said to incline to ‘sentimentalism’ and ‘the effeminate’, was also, ‘in a greater degree’, a musician of ‘strength’ who could ‘hit with the hammer of Thor’. Besides, Stainer’s feminine choral music was really only a ploy for popularity, the sentimental tunes being ‘those which best please[d] the ladies.’<sup>13</sup> The choir’s female audience and performers, it seems, demanded ‘same-sex’ music. Bred on these myths, of non-singing Englishmen and a feminine English choralism, singing blacks in the Colony must indeed have appeared different in their musicality.

The portability of the trope of black musicality – from precolonial through to mission musicking – perhaps also marked it out from ‘black music’, from a specific repertory of song. While travellers, scientists and missionaries were busy observing, or more likely recounting others’ observations of all-night singathons, black singers were curiously said to have no music. Quite late, the Lovedale newspaper, *The Kaffir Express*, restated the myth: ‘The Kaffirs do not appear to have had any airs *of their own*.’<sup>14</sup> The basis for the claim, I suggest, was that a land without any music was fair game for the musical colonist, much as a land with no people had been there for the taking.<sup>15</sup> We know all about the mission’s proscriptions against precolonial musicking. The conviction that black South Africans had ‘no music of any kind’ made the mission’s prescriptions of a new repertory – hymns, miscellaneous choruses, brass band marches – seem all the more benevolent.<sup>16</sup> As the mission gave its converts the Word, so it gave them music *tout court*.

Less nefarious, the myth was also simply an all-too-common instance of cultural miscomprehension. When a mission article on ‘Native Literature’ claimed that there was ‘no heathen literature, no records of past events or thoughts’, but added that there were ‘oral traditions already waxed dim enough, and ... a folklore that has never been gathered’, it

was not being inconsistent.<sup>17</sup> For literature, here, entailed the written word; note its shared etymology with literacy. With music too. It was thus around the same time that Lovedale promoted the composition of what it called 'Kaffir Songs', mission-sanctioned music to fill the void created by its proscriptions, that it introduced formal music education, including instruction in tonic sol-fa literacy, to the school curriculum.<sup>18</sup> Getting converts to read music would finally give them music.

The idea of a land, a 'race', without music was not a uniquely colonising trick. Victorian England, lest we forget, was labelled 'the land without music,' the Victorians branded, by themselves included, as 'unmusical'.<sup>19</sup> In his enormously popular, and populist, *Music and Morals*, the Rev. Hugh Reginald Haweis stated as simple fact: '*the English are not a Musical People*'.<sup>20</sup> More recently, the myth has been dispelled and accounted for. Victorian England was quite a musical place after all, except that music-making was primarily the province of women, the 'lower' classes and foreigners; hence those mute metropolitan males mentioned earlier.<sup>21</sup> Phyllis Weliver sums up the evidence: '*Das Land ohne Musik* is a gender-packed, class-based, nationalistic idea.'<sup>22</sup> In part, yes. But the 'problem' was not that the English did not perform, or even compose, but that its composers 'failed' at certain types of music. At issue was the content of *die Musik*, and English composers' failure to fulfil the generic requirements of that music. Briefly, Victorian Britain's output is seen to have been predominantly choral, while the nineteenth-century music bequeathed to us by the Continent, that is 'the canon', is of the 'serious', instrumental and operatic sort.<sup>23</sup>

England's musical lack, then, was specifically a compositional lag, and Victorian arguments forwarded for this state were to be refracted in colonial discourse. It was claimed, for instance, that blacks had no 'airs of their own [...] due to the want of inventiveness', a situation that perhaps also underpinned descriptions of black musicking as 'monotonous'.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the imperative to originality formed a backdrop to Victorian self-analysis. The 'great curse' of the Victorian composer, concluded Henry Davey, was that 'he would not dare to invent anything'. For J.A. Fuller Maitland, the English were a 'race of mere copyists', 'the slightest attempt at originality [...] held as a blasphemous innovation'. Here too the charge of monotony recurred. Rosa Newmarch bemoaned the 'lamentable monotony of the [Victorian] past', 'the monotonous manufacture of choral works'.<sup>25</sup>

Not only was creativity as compositional activity a matter of nationality or race in the nineteenth century, but it was also gendered. The Woman Composer Question, which inquired into the apparent failure of women as composers, and was much discussed late in the century, gives an example of the issues involved.<sup>26</sup> As was the case for the lack of black music, it was claimed that woman's 'musical barrenness', as *The Musical Times* aptly put it, was due to her lack of inventiveness.<sup>27</sup> Scientific opinion was even drawn into the debate. For Sir J. Crichton-Browne, in a talk to the Medical Society, the female composer's 'failure to evolve new harmonies or even new melodies [was] one of the most extraordinary enigmas in the history of the fine arts', a fact the physician pinned down to 'the inferiority of woman to man in the cerebral sub-stratum of ideo-motor energy'.<sup>28</sup> Not that this meant that women were not musical. As we have seen, in Victorian Britain musicality was the preserve of women, amongst others. More precisely, musicality *as performance* belonged to the female sphere.<sup>29</sup> And as a matter of point in the Woman Composer Question, women were routinely heralded

as the ideal performers of man's music; if it was largely the females of the congregation who were singing, they were by and large singing male-composed tunes. The gist was that 'woman [did] not originate, she only interpret[ed] or reproduce[d]'.<sup>30</sup>

The same was said of singing blacks. Having either no music, or none of 'their own', they were musical in their performances of white men's music. Hence the enduring colonial stereotype of blacks as 'mimic men'. The colonial historian George McCall Theal spoke a commonplace in writing that blacks 'have power in imitating, but very little of inventing'.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, black musicking seemed an exemplary case of mimicry, and in his summary of the 'general character of [black] African music', Wallaschek listed the 'great imitative talent in connection with the music'.<sup>32</sup>

Musicality was further feminised by drawing a correspondence between the 'natures' of music and women. The Victorians typically concluded, for example, that women gave expression to, and so were ruled by, 'emotion'. It is common knowledge that the feminising of emotionality was one element of a well-worn and long-standing Western binary. *The Magazine of Music* could thus write: 'Because [women] are easily moved, because they habitually judge and act by their feelings, it is assumed that as emotional beings they are the superiors of men, who rarely show feeling, but are the embodiments of reason'.<sup>33</sup> Music, too, as the history of aesthetics and a popular saying – 'the language of emotions' – tells us, had been emotionalised by the nineteenth century. Joseph Goddard's mid-century *Philosophy of Music* uttered conventional wisdom when it spoke of 'the emotional origin of Music', and music's 'sole function of imbuing emotion'.<sup>34</sup> A discursive union of the emotional art and 'the sex' thus became an orthodoxy. It was plain, for example, for a writer of *The Sewanee Review*, that '[s]ince music is the language of the emotions and appeals directly to the heart, it must necessarily affect strongly a being so preëminently [*sic*] emotional [such as women], one who consults the heart much oftener than the head'.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, the emotional reserve of the Victorian male was cited to excuse his musical reticence; he would not sing in church because 'fashionable English society ... repudiate[d] all show of feeling ... teach[ing] that a gentleman should never seem moved'.<sup>36</sup>

Similar reasoning for the feminising of musicality pertained for musicalising blacks, the emotionalising of race going hand-in-hand with its musicalising. In one breath, then, Haweis found the 'negro [to be] more really musical than the Englishman', while in the previous utterance he had emotionalised race: the negro's nature was 'impulsive', her religion 'plaintive, and emotional'.<sup>37</sup> This nexus of associations was mainstream knowledge. Hanslick, for one, drew on it in distinguishing different modes of listening, as an apologist for the Viennese aesthete explained in a lecture to the Royal Musical Association:

The ordinary listener enjoys music in the passive reception of its sensuous elements. His relation towards music is not introspective, but 'pathological'. ... The true musical listener, however, attends more to the structure of the composition ... Upon savages, music exerts a more direct emotional influence than it does upon cultivated people ... The man of sentiment inquires whether a piece be joyful or sad; the musician, on the other hand, whether it be good or bad. [Hanslick] sets, in opposition to what he understands as the true way of hearing music, the rough emotion of the savage in the same class with the dreamy intoxication of the musical sentimentalist.<sup>38</sup>

The scenario of a populist, emotive listening, then, was propped up by the evidence of ‘the savage’, a signifier of emotionality and ‘raw’ musicality. (And to extrapolate at a push: was formalist musicology tainted at its birth also by race?)

As with investigations into the biological basis of female emotionality, black emotionality became the subject of science. One example is Dudley Kidd’s *The Essential Kafir*, written ‘in order that when the reader puts down the book he may feel not so much that he knows a great deal *about* the Kafirs ... but that he *knows the Kafir*’.<sup>39</sup> In elaborating racial mentalities – ‘The whole mental furniture of a Kafir’s mind differs from that of a European’ – Kidd also reified black emotionality:

The natives are very emotional ... To see natives in the midst of an old-fashioned Wesleyan revival is a thing that can never be forgotten ... The natives lie about the floor in heaps, crying, shouting, laughing, gesticulating, struggling, praying. All order is blown to the winds, and emotion runs riot. There is no holding the people in once they are in full gallop: they have to be left until the storm wears itself out ... They would rejoice in a Salvation Army after-meeting, provided the noise was plentiful.<sup>40</sup>

While Kidd compared Xhosa revivalism to Salvation Army practice, metropolitan commentators compared the Army to black religious practice:

These services are very much like the negro camp meeting. The gesticulation, the rhythmical clapping, the yell before entering upon the chorus, are points of a resemblance which is almost complete. Probably there has been no copying by the Salvation Army, and the conclusion must be that both are the natural result of strong feelings unrestrained, acting upon the raw material of humanity.<sup>41</sup>

The Army’s *raison d’être*, of course, was to evangelise to the working classes, which, like women and blacks, had been emotionalised in dominant Victorian representations.

Discourses of scientific racism often only gave coherence to older, commonplace threads, tales spun already from the first white imaginings about and experiences of life in Africa. Straddling these worlds of Victorian science and the African ‘reality’ was Lovedale’s second principal, the Rev. Dr James Stewart. Trained at first as a medical student during the mid-century in Edinburgh, locus of the rise of racial science in Britain,<sup>42</sup> the influential Scottish churchman was at the forefront of developments in the African mission, and to a lesser extent in Cape government native policy.<sup>43</sup> He was also, I suggest (and the context of his early education is significant), an important broker in discourses of racial science to the Colony.<sup>44</sup> Stewart’s life’s work received summation in his *magnum opus*, *Dawn in the Dark Continent*, a distillation of the Duff Missionary Lectures he had delivered at Edinburgh University in 1902 as elder statesman of the African mission. In its sweep, the ‘epoch-making’ volume’s analysis of mission is impressive, written, noted the *Expository Times*, ‘as a man of science rather than as a missionary’.<sup>45</sup>

One of the themes of *Dawn in the Dark Continent* is precisely the rapprochement between science and mission. For example, Stewart appropriated the thought of the social evolutionist Benjamin Kidd to support his argument that ‘any future progress ... either in civilisation or in Christianity’ would be grounded in ‘the elements of native African character’.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, he began with an analysis of ‘the contents and contradictions [found] in the character and mental



constitution of the African.’<sup>47</sup> Here, Stewart did a good deal of debunking: ‘the African’ was no child, s/he did possess powers of ratiocination. But the myth of African emotionality stuck. And old evidence for the claim was presented: ‘This prevalence of emotion leads to the belief that there are certain yet undeveloped elements in his character. He is fond beyond measure of music, seems to have an instinctive knowledge of harmony, and an extraordinary power of keeping time.’<sup>48</sup> Two points suggest themselves from the juxtaposition of emotionality and musicality. Most obviously, and as for Victorian women, musicality signified emotionalism. More interestingly, it could be used by and for the civilizing mission. Already more than thirty years earlier, *The Kaffir Express* had pondered ‘the best means ... to use in order that all the different sides of the African character may be reached’. Appearing top of the list of the African’s ‘different constitution’ was ‘an ear for music’. And through the agency of black musicality, working in combination with the black ‘faculty of imitation’, the ‘race’ would be ‘rais[ed] and train[ed]’. Provided, of course, the right examples, such as Victorian choral music and hymns, were given.<sup>49</sup>

It has long been noted that precolonial Xhosa musicking is predominantly vocal. Certainly in early ethnographic accounts it is singing; ‘as for instrumental [music]’, claimed the missionary William C. Holden, ‘they have none.’<sup>50</sup> This, I suggest, the missionaries appropriated for their own ends, easily substituting precolonial musicking for Victorian choralism precisely, if banally, because they were both sung. Skeptics may argue that singing is, if not universal, then pretty well nigh. But there are also more specific similarities between precolonial Xhosa musicking and that of the Victorian churchmen.<sup>51</sup> In short, choral song was taken as axiomatic to both ways of living. Hence the Xhosa converts seemed to have taken quickly and easily to the new practices. To be sure, choralism was part of the entire reformation package, bound up both with black class aspirations and missionary civilizing prescriptions. But so were other Western practices that never caught on in spite of their exemplary bourgeois status and missionary promotion. More to the present point, it was the window onto singing blacks that opened the mission’s eyes to the utility of black choralism. Africa’s most famous missionary, David Livingstone, captured this logic: ‘Music has great influence on those who have musical ears, and often leads to conversion.’<sup>52</sup> If musicality was set to work in the construction of ‘race’, it was also a potential deliverer from blackness, aiding to usher in the mission’s hoped-for dawn in the dark continent. Black mission choralism was one of those rays, black musicality one of the enabling conditions for the genesis of black choral culture.

<sup>1</sup> This is not to be confused with what Klaus P. Wachsmann called ‘the Western fantasy about African rhythm’, a more limited construction of musical otherness; ‘Music’, in: *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, Vol. 6, Nos. 2-3, 1969, p. 187. For a discussion of the black musicality trope in ante-bellum America, see Ronald Radano: ‘Denoting Difference: The Writing of the Slave Spirituals’, in: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 22, 1996, pp. 506-44.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Wallaschek: *Primitive Music: An Inquiry into the Origin and Development of Music, Songs, Instruments, Dances, and Pantomimes of Savage Races*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1893, pp. 231-2.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Trollope: *South Africa*, ed. J.H. Davidson. Cape Town: A.A. Balkema, 1973 [1878], p. 169; Francis Carey Slater: *Settler’s Heritage*. Lovedale, South Africa: Lovedale Press, 1954, p. 85, my emphasis.

<sup>4</sup> The Lovedale principal, James Stewart, thought it sufficiently important to footnote in his *magnum*

- opus* that 'travellers erroneously supposed that hymn-singing forms a large part of daily instruction and occupation'; *Dawn in the Dark Continent, or Africa and Its Missions*. Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1906, pp. 251-2.
- <sup>5</sup> John Spencer Curwen: *Studies in Worship Music, Chiefly as Regards Congregational History*, 1st series. London: J. Curwen & Sons, 1888, 2nd ed., p. 321.
  - <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.
  - <sup>7</sup> 'Practical Hints on Congregational Psalmody', in: *The Parish Choir; or, Church Music Book*, April 1847, p. 127. For other pre- and early Victorian statements of the myth, see John Antes La Trobe: *The Music of the Church, Considered in Its Various Branches, Congregational and Choral: An Historical and Practical Treatise for the General Reader*. London: L.B. Seeley and Sons, 1831, p. 403; Robert Druitt: *A Popular Tract on Church Music, with Remarks on Its Moral and Political Importance, and a Practical Scheme for Its Reformation*. London: Francis & John Rivington, 1845, p. 22; and Steuart Adolphus Pears: *Remarks on the Protestant Theory of Church Music*. London: T. Hatchard, 1852, pp. 21-2.
  - <sup>8</sup> The all-male choral institutions such as cathedrals, of course, exempted.
  - <sup>9</sup> Dave Russell: *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914: A Social History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997, 2nd ed., pp. 259-60, 292; see also Henry Davey: *History of English Music*. London: J. Curwen & Sons, 1895, p. 457. A 'slice of history' examination of advertisements placed in *The Musical Times*, primarily for church choristers, for the years 1900, 1891 and 1881, shows that during the last two decades of the century 'wanted' notices for men choristers by far exceeded those for women; I excluded from my analysis the all-male choirs of the cathedrals, colleges and Chapels Royal. With late Victorian witness to female presence in the parish church choir in mind, this suggests that the supply of women singers was sufficient to obviate advertising, while filling the male positions became a perennial problem. Empirical evidence for the social basis of Victorian choralism is thin, so any conclusions must remain tentative.
  - <sup>10</sup> 'Au Courant', in: *The Magazine of Music*, Dec. 1895, p. 254. The article was reacting to the news of an all-women brass band. In charting how late Victorian and Edwardian musical women variously 'encroach[ed] on all man's privileges', Paula Gillett does not consider the choir; *Musical Women in England, 1870-1914: 'Encroaching on All Man's Privileges'*. London: Macmillan, 2000.
  - <sup>11</sup> Joseph Bennett: 'Victorian Music', in: *The Musical Times*, serialised Jan.-Dec. 1897, p. 225.
  - <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 267, 226, 300.
  - <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 302, 300-1, 226.
  - <sup>14</sup> 'Kaffir Poetry', in: *The Kaffir Express*, Aug. 1874, p. 1, my emphasis.
  - <sup>15</sup> The influential 'Colonial Historiographer', George McCall Theal, whose career had begun at Lovedale, proposed that South Africa was unoccupied at the time of its European discovery, that black populations moved into the region only at the same time as whites, and that the land was therefore up for grabs; see Christopher Saunders: *The Making of the South African Past: Major Historians on Race and Class*. Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1988, pp. 38, 41. For colonialism's 'empty space' argument, see Mary Louise Pratt: *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 52.
  - <sup>16</sup> 'Work Among the Heathen', in: *The Christian Express*, Feb. 1877, p. 1.
  - <sup>17</sup> K.: 'Native Literature', in: *The Christian Express*, Dec. 1877, p. 2.
  - <sup>18</sup> For more on these matters, see Grant Olwage: 'Music and (Post)Colonialism: The Dialectics of Choral Culture on a South African Frontier', Ph.D. diss., Rhodes University, 2003, chap. 2.
  - <sup>19</sup> For the origins of the phrase '*Das Land ohne Musik*' and the notion of English unmusicality, see the letters columns of *The Musical Times*, 1975, pp. 439, 625, 877. Evidence for the longevity of the idea, from the early nineteenth century through the twentieth, is given in Nicholas Temperley: 'Xenophilia in British Music History', in: *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, Vol. 1, ed. Bennett Zon. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, pp. 4-5.
  - <sup>20</sup> Hugh Reginald Haweis: *Music and Morals*. London: W.H. Allen, 1888, 15th ed., pp. 122, 483.
  - <sup>21</sup> Musicality seems to have been a perennial marker of otherness. In addition to its gendering and racialising work, it also, argues Philip Brett, has a history of queering; 'Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet', in: *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth



- Wood and Gary C. Thomas. New York and London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 9-26. Tolstoy drew on this repertoire in his novella *The Kreutzer Sonata* in describing the musician Trukhachevsky: 'He was of slight physique ... and he had a particularly well-developed posterior, as women have, or as Hottentots are said to have. I believe they're also said to be musical'; quoted in Richard Leppert: *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993, p. 169. For recent explorations of the gendering of musicking in Victorian Britain, see Gillett: *Musical Women in England*; and Phyllis Weliver: *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860-1900: Representations of Music, Science and Gender in the Leisured Home*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000.
- <sup>22</sup> Weliver: *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction*, p. 20.
- <sup>23</sup> See Olwage: 'Music and (Post)Colonialism', intro. to part 1, for the 'choralising' of Victorian music and the concomitant instrumentalising of the 'English Musical Renaissance'.
- <sup>24</sup> 'Kaffir Poetry', in: *The Kaffir Express*, Aug. 1874, p. 1.
- <sup>25</sup> Henry Davey: *History of English Music*, pp. 496-7; John Alexander, Fuller Maitland: *English Music in the XIXth Century*. London: Grant Richard, 1902, pp. 61-2; Rosa Newmarch: *Henry J. Wood*. London & New York: John Lane, 1904, pp. 16, 14.
- <sup>26</sup> See Gillett: *Musical Women in England*, chap. 1, for more on the debate.
- <sup>27</sup> 'The Feminine in Music', in: *The Musical Times*, Oct. 1882, p. 521. See also Ferdinand Praeger, quoted in Stephen S. Stratton: 'Woman in Relation to Musical Art', in: *Proceedings of the Musical Association, for the Investigation and Discussion of Subjects Connected with the Art and Science of Music*, 1883, pp. 134-5.
- <sup>28</sup> 'Sex and Music', in: *The Lancet*, 14 May 1892, p. 1097.
- <sup>29</sup> Hence, perhaps, the concerted late Victorian effort to masculinise performance as the physicality of athleticism. See, for example, two *Musical Times* articles: 'The Strong Man in Music', June 1895, pp. 373-4; and 'Manliness in Music', Aug. 1889, pp. 460-1. This endeavour to regender music was part of the much-written about late Victorian resurgence in hegemonic masculinity; for an overview, see John Tosh: 'What Should Historians Do With Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain', in: *History Workshop*, Vol. 38, 1994, pp. 192-4.
- <sup>30</sup> 'The Feminine in Music', in: *The Musical Times*, Oct. 1882, p. 521, also Stratton: 'Woman in Relation to Musical Art', p. 122; and Haweis: *Music and Morals*, pp. 61, 110.
- <sup>31</sup> Quoted in Saunders: *The Making of the South African Past*, p. 31.
- <sup>32</sup> Wallaschek: *Primitive Music*, p. 15; see also 'Hints to Our Friends', in: *The Kaffir Express*, April 1872, p. 2.
- <sup>33</sup> J.C.H.: 'The "Eternal Feminine" Question', in: *The Magazine of Music*, June 1894, p. 15.
- <sup>34</sup> Joseph Goddard: *The Philosophy of Music: A Series of Essays*. London: Boosey & Sons, 1862, pp. 100, 105.
- <sup>35</sup> T.L. Krebs: 'Women as Musicians', in: *The Sewanee Review*, 1893-94, p. 76. Richard Leppert suggests that the relation between the categories 'woman' and 'music' is fundamental to the social construction of those categories; *The Sight of Sound*, p. 219. To pick up on an earlier point: as composition was a product of rational activity, went the argument, female emotionality was the reason for woman's compositional ineptitude.
- <sup>36</sup> Druitt: *A Popular Tract on Church Music*, p. 22; see also Henry Cary Shuttleworth: *The Place of Music in Public Worship*. London: Elliot Stock, 1892, p. 4.
- <sup>37</sup> Haweis: *Music and Morals*, pp. 499-500.
- <sup>38</sup> Eustace J. Breakespear: 'Musical Aesthetics', in: *Proceedings of the Musical Association, For the Investigation and Discussion of Subjects Connected with the Art and Science of Music*, 1880, p. 67. The 'man of sentiment' might more profitably have been, and typically was, cast as a woman in late Victorian Britain; sentimentality, crudely to do with emotional excess, had been gendered feminine in Britain since at least the late eighteenth century; see Janet Todd: *Sensibility: An Introduction*. London and New York: Methuen, 1986, chap. 2, and p. 140.
- <sup>39</sup> Dudley Kidd: *The Essential Kafir*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1904, p. vi.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 277, 293.
- <sup>41</sup> 'The Music of the Salvation Army', in: *Tonic Sol-fa Reporter*, Aug. 1884, p. 325.

- <sup>42</sup> See Robert J.C. Young: *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 123.
- <sup>43</sup> For 'official' accounts of Stewart's life and work, see James Wells: *Stewart of Lovedale: The Life of James Stewart*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908; and R.H.W. Shepherd: *Lovedale: The Story of a Century, 1841-1941*. Lovedale, South Africa: Lovedale Press, n.d. [1941], chap. 5. Sheila M. Brock gives a more critical reading; 'James Stewart and Lovedale: A Reappraisal of Missionary Attitudes and African Response in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, 1870-1905' Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1974.
- <sup>44</sup> Historians of racial discourse in South Africa have, I think, tended to post-date the appearance of explicit theorizing on race in South Africa due to an over-reliance on the major monograph publications of the early twentieth century and, conversely, a neglect of the more ephemeral missionary archive. To take but one, albeit perhaps atypical, example that unsettles this thesis: the widely-read *Christian Express*, under Stewart's editorship during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, not infrequently reprinted the metropolitan insights of scientific racism, either matter-of-factly or as matters for dispute.
- <sup>45</sup> Quoted in Stewart, *Dawn in the Dark Continent*.
- <sup>46</sup> This discussion occurs in a section on 'The Future of Africa and the African,' an extended apology for the potential of South African blacks for civilization, made in the face of an increasingly ambivalent colonial government and imperial policy towards the civilizing mission; see Saul Dubow: 'Race, Civilisation and Culture: The Elaboration of Segregationist Discourse in the Inter-War Years', in: *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, ed. Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido. London and New York: Longman, 1987, p. 74.
- <sup>47</sup> Stewart, *Dawn in the Dark Continent*, p. 362.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366. Wallaschek summed up Victorian wisdom, concluding that '[a]mong savages the influence of music is far more distinctly noticeable than among people in a higher state of civilisation'; *Primitive Music*, p. 163.
- <sup>49</sup> 'Hints to Our Friends', in: *The Kaffir Express*, April 1872, p. 2.
- <sup>50</sup> William C. Holden: *The Past and Future of the Kaffir Race*. London: Author, n.d. [1866], p. 271. A good example of the absent presence of Xhosa instrumentalism in the colonial archive occurs in Percival R. Kirby's classic *The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa*. London: Oxford University Press, 1934. Drawing heavily on early travel literature in his account of Xhosa instruments, Kirby at the same time cites various sources in concluding that '[m]ost writers content themselves with saying that the Kaffirs made little or no use of music instruments', p. 204.
- <sup>51</sup> One that has received much notice was the shared preference for multi-part singing. The colonial administrator, William Charles Scully, remarked that 'the mission-trained native ... picks up part-music with strange facility'; 'Kaffir Music', in: *By Veldt and Kopje*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907, p. 285. See also Veit Erlmann: *Nightsong: Performance, Power, and Practice in South Africa*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 54; and David Coplan: *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985, p. 29. For other correspondences, see Olwage, 'Music and (Post)Colonialism', chap. 5.
- <sup>52</sup> David Livingstone: *The Last Journals of David Livingstone, in Central Africa, from 1865 to His Death*, Vol. 2, ed. Horace Waller. London: John Murray, 1874, p. 201.

# POPULAR SONG, GENDER EQUALITY AND THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE

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Shirli Gilbert

This chapter takes as its broad subject the popular music of the struggle against apartheid; or, more precisely, the corpus of songs commonly referred to as ‘freedom songs’. My initial attraction to this subject stemmed from my long-standing interest in a body of music that is in some respects closely related to the freedom songs: the songs created in the ghettos and concentration camps of the Second World War in resistance to Nazi oppression. Although both the content of these two bodies of song and the historical circumstances in which they originated differ markedly, my preliminary research<sup>1</sup> on the subject of freedom songs draws in significant ways on concepts and theoretical frameworks that have shaped my thinking about songs created in response to the Holocaust.

One broad point of commonality, and an apposite place to start, relates to the roles that cultural activity, and music in particular, can assume within oppressed communities. To state it briefly and somewhat crudely, songs of the kind to which I will refer in this paper often constitute a valuable resource for social historians attempting to understand the dynamics of subjugated communities, particularly those communities for whom conventional channels of communication and expression are restricted or proscribed. Songs, in these contexts, are often created and disseminated orally, are easily remembered, and if popular can spread with remarkable rapidity across wide-ranging social and geographical landscapes. As such, they can constitute an effective shared space where interpretations of and responses to the situation at hand are expressed and engaged with on a communal level.

Songs also function as a space where those who are marginalized by mainstream society can find a voice to articulate their identities and experiences. They acknowledge wishes, uncertainties, hopes and predictions in the public realm, sometimes communicate new empirical information, and endorse particular attitudes and responses. As they circulate, individuals and groups choose to identify with them, modify them, add to them, or to reject them; sometimes they do not engage with them at all. The process through which songs acquire popularity is obviously informal and unregulated, and it is impossible to extract from them an essential collective narrative. Nonetheless, patterns of popularity can often show how, in active but not always conscious ways, communities articulate the ideas and perspectives that preoccupy them most strongly and persistently, and the ways in which they understand themselves and their circumstances. Lastly, songs can be an important space where communities inscribe and preserve the ideas they want to remember and have remembered. (I shall return to this idea later).

In this paper I am concerned primarily with the experiences of black women during the anti-apartheid struggle, and in particular with the position of their fight for gender equality in the context of their larger quest for national liberation. Leading on from the idea of informal

music-making as a space where the marginalized can find a voice, I embarked on this research wanting to find out to what extent the experiences of women are represented or reflected in these songs, and what the songs can reveal of the attitudes and perspectives they might have chosen to adopt. Black working-class women in apartheid South Africa have frequently been identified as suffering under a 'triple oppression', based not only on race and class, but also on gender.<sup>2</sup> To what extent might their distinctively gendered experiences of oppression and exclusion be expressed in songs of the anti-apartheid struggle? How much awareness is devoted to the experiences of mothers and families (traditionally seen as women's domain)? Did black women ever use song as an autobiographical tool through which to articulate their particular experiences? And to what extent, if at all, did the struggle for equality as women ever impact upon the broader discourse of the struggle against racial injustice in which they were involved?

Some of the first obviously gendered songs that I came across in my research were those associated with MK (Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the African National Congress). Particularly from the 1960s onwards, many of the anti-apartheid songs began to emphasize armed resistance, often referring explicitly to violent action intended for specific figures such as Vorster and Verwoerd.<sup>3</sup> Emphasis on the involvement of men and boys in the armed struggle was particularly pronounced, as sociologist Jacklyn Cock has demonstrated. Of those who left South Africa to undergo military training with MK in exile, she writes: 'They are socialized into violence through a particularly militarist conception of masculinity. This is reinforced by a gender-defined sense of social solidarity, a brotherhood of combatants.' These soldiers were frequently 'heroized' by township youth, and symbols that glorified the armed struggle – the toyi-toyi, the black beret, the petrol bomb and wooden AK47s – all became part of a militaristic, masculine subculture in township life. Following in this mould, many of the most popular MK songs were explicitly violent and masculinist:

The Boer is oppressing us  
The SADF is shooting us like animals.  
Kill the Boer.

~

There is Sasolburg, the Supreme Court, Warmbaths,  
Koeberg, Pitoli, going up in flames.  
We are going there, the Umkhonto *boys* have arrived.  
We are going there. Hayi, Hayi. We are going forward.  
Don't be worried, the *boys* know their job.  
Let Africa return.<sup>4</sup>

My initial searches in the few published books and sound recordings available on the subject of freedom songs did not turn up any similar material associated with women's roles, particularly not within the context of MK. Women were for the most part excluded from traditional combat roles, although Cock argues that they were recognized to have played an important part in MK activities, and to have 'formed a complex web of support that sustained combatants in many ways'. Cock sees women's support as existing primarily in the 'infrastructure of resistance' that they provided, acting as couriers, providing intelligence

and refuge, and giving resistance its 'mass character' by participating in rent and consumer boycotts.<sup>5</sup> Leading on from this characterization of women's involvement in the struggle, I began to look for more songs associated with women in particular, in an attempt to discover whether music might also have something to say about their distinctive roles, and whether it played a part in mobilizing them and giving their struggle a voice.

Black women asserted their resistance to apartheid powerfully and visibly, and were often more aggressive than their male counterparts in challenging issues such as passes and influx control. The 1950s was a period of unprecedented female involvement in political organizations and mass protests, particularly in the form of the anti-pass campaign.<sup>6</sup> This reached its apex on 9 August 1956, with a demonstration in which some 20,000 women converged on the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Albertina Sisulu gave this description of the event:

I couldn't believe it when I arrived. There was a sea of women, a huge mass, oh, it was wonderful. We were so excited. We couldn't believe we were there, and so many of us. Our leaders, Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Sophie Williams, and Rahima Moosa attempted to give our protests to the prime minister, J.G. Strijdom, but when we got there, he'd left, he'd run away. [...] When the four women returned, we stood in silent protest for thirty minutes and then started singing *Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika*. Twenty thousand women singing *Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika*, you should have heard the sound of the echoes in the Union Building. There was nothing like that sound, it filled the world. Then we sang a song of the women, *Strijdom, wathint'abafazi, wathint'imbokodo, uzakufa* – Strijdom, you have tampered with the women, you have struck a rock, you have unleashed a boulder, you will die.<sup>7</sup>

The phrase 'Wathint'abafazi, Wathint'imbokodo' (You strike a woman, you strike a rock) was quickly appropriated in popular discourse, and began to spring up in many different contexts linked to the anti-apartheid struggle, from placards and pamphlets to documentaries, books, and speeches. Associated with the landmark 1956 demonstration, the song became a powerful symbol of women's involvement in the struggle, and expressed their resolve, strength and immovability in defending their cause.

Despite women's powerful and visible presence in the struggle, however, many critics have argued that rather than emerging from any kind of feminist consciousness, women's resistance activities were predicated primarily on their defence of established gender roles and patriarchal institutions, and that the basis for their solidarity was their concern with the effects of government controls on their traditional domain – children and the home.<sup>8</sup> As Cheryl Walker asserts,

The women who defied the reference book units were not demonstrating consciously for freedom or equality; one of the strongest reasons why women were opposed to passes was that they were seen as a direct threat to the family.<sup>9</sup>

Feminist theorist Julia Wells has used the term 'motherism' to describe what she sees as the essentially conservative act of using traditional female roles as a way of tackling social injustice. She argues that, because the image of women as mothers is so entrenched and powerful in most societies, women's most effective calls to action have tended, historically, to revolve around 'their roles as mothers and defenders of their children.'<sup>10</sup> This emphasis on the identity of motherhood was perhaps the most distinctively gendered aspect of women's

involvement in the struggle, and one that constituted an effective platform around which women's organizations could rally. This is evident, for example, in official statements issued by the Federation of South African Women (FSAW), the largest and most important multi-racial women's organization during the apartheid years: 'As wives and mothers we condemn the pass laws and all they imply'; 'Women are not afraid of suffering for the sake of their children and their homes. Women have an answer to the threats to their families and their future. Women will not face a future imprisoned in the pass laws.'<sup>11</sup>

Several critics have in recent years challenged the assumption that the political organization of women around maternal roles necessarily constitutes a defence of patriarchy.<sup>12</sup> It is nonetheless widely accepted that, for the most part, the struggle for black women's empowerment in apartheid South Africa was subsumed by the struggle for national liberation.<sup>13</sup> Walker argues that the FSAW saw women's struggle in South Africa as a two-pronged one:

... first and foremost, the struggle for national liberation and the overthrow of apartheid structures, and second, coupled to the former in some hazy way, the struggle by women against the 'laws and institutions' that discriminated against them as women. [...] the first aim dominated the FSAW's programme. For most members it was their blackness rather than their femaleness that ultimately determined their political practice – although the power of the pass campaign to mobilize women undoubtedly lay in its fusion of these two elemental strands of African women's identity around a single issue, and much of the FSAW's programme was directed at women in their role as mothers. Inasmuch as discrimination against women was looked at, it was often as the barrier to women's full participation in the national struggle – i.e., as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.<sup>14</sup>

Given the capacity of songs to operate as a space where 'counter-worlds' of experience can be articulated, to what extent might songs from the struggle enrich or deepen this understanding of women's roles? The story surrounding 'You strike a woman, you strike a rock' already makes clear that communal singing played an important role amongst women's organizations, and the numerous songs associated with women suggest that song was a space where, at least to some extent, women could demonstrate their committed presence – their voice – in the struggle against racial inequality.<sup>15</sup> Women's groups are prominently represented in a collection of song-sheets from the 1980s housed at the University of Cape Town, for example, a collection representing a diverse range of workers' youth and other organizations vocal in their resistance to apartheid. Songbooks used by groups like the FSAW and the United Women's Organization (UWO) include not only standard items from the 'freedom songs' repertoire – well-known and widely sung songs like 'Senzenina' (What Have We Done?), 'Rolihlahla Mandela', 'We Shall Not be Moved', 'Forward We Shall March', and 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' – but also a variety of songs addressed particularly to women and emphasizing their presence. One example is 'Umzabalazo' (The Struggle), which in one version explicitly asserts, 'We are the women, we're in the struggle!'<sup>16</sup>

Many of these women's songs appeared not only in the songbooks of women's organizations, but also in the collections of workers' and other organizations, where they were presumably widely circulated and sung by mixed groups. Some of these songs included 'Manyani makosikazi manyani' (Unite women, unite), which urged women to come together under the rubric of the UWO or the UDF (depending on the version), and another called 'Joinani',



which urged women to join the UWO or UDF as volunteers and 'let Africa return' (the refrain 'Mayibuye iAfrika' is a common one in many of these songs). I found a song with the refrain 'We the women will not be killed by Botha / We the workers want our rights' in a song-sheet distributed by the Adhoc Women's Committee in the 1980s. There is also the popular 'Malibongwe', a song giving praise to women, where names of prominent figures would be introduced in successive verses:

Igama lamakosikazi, Malibongwe (x2)

Malibongwe, malibongwe (x2)

Igama lika Comrade Dora Malibongwe (x2)

Malibongwe, malibongwe (x2) etc.

~

Let the name of women be praised (x2)

Let it be praised (x2)

Let the name of Comrade Dora be praised (x2)

Let it be praised (x2) etc.

Unsurprisingly for songs created and conveyed primarily in an oral fashion, most of these songs circulated in numerous variants, with additional verses and slightly altered melodies, and with new names and events added as historical circumstances changed.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the relatively large number of songs focusing specifically on women's *presence* in the struggle, however, few that I found seem to address their particular *experiences*; they are also conspicuously silent on the issue of women's equality. The only song I encountered that fell into this category – a moving melody called 'Madam' sung by Dolly Rathebe and Sophie Mgcina in the movie *Amandla!* – expressed the helpless frustration of a domestic worker who cares for another woman's family at the expense of her own (the song's narrative is addressed to the white 'madam'). Although the song does not seem to come out of any kind of feminist consciousness, it expresses a powerfully gendered experience of oppression. Interestingly, this particular song was not included on the CD that accompanied the film. Are there more songs – songs perhaps also not included in popular documentaries and CD compilations – that represent a wider scope of women's experiences under apartheid?

I would like to conclude this chapter by raising several questions for further research and debate. First, I would like to return to the idea of song as a valuable resource in constructing the social history of oppressed communities. It is widely accepted nowadays that our understanding of history gains not only from the 'facts' contained in 'official' documentary sources – which almost inevitably mirror the agendas and concerns of official institutions and those in positions of authority – but also from the experiences and responses of those who are marginalized and oppressed. We are unlikely, however, to find the experiences of black mothers, wives and workers documented in the archives, although oral history projects have begun to emphasize the importance of this kind of 'history from below'. In this context cultural products of an oral tradition, especially songs, can be invaluable communal storehouses of attitudes and ideas, since they often record responses that were expressed and shared at the time, and that never made it into the 'official' accounts. It is feasible that more fieldwork

and gathering of women's songs will open up a rich avenue of source material for historians seeking to understand the experiences of ordinary women under apartheid.

It has been widely documented that, for both black and white women under apartheid, race rather than gender consciousness tended to determine where political loyalties lay. It is only in the past decade or so that distinctly feminist perspectives have begun to find a place in South African women's movements. In the early 1990s several national women's organizations were formed with the specific purpose of addressing women-centred agendas. These groups have begun to mobilize in significant ways around self-defined interests – issues including, but not confined to, the sexual division of labour, rape, domestic violence, reproductive rights and better living conditions for women. The struggle for gender equality in South Africa is in many senses only just beginning, and many women's rights activists have expressed their continued concern at the under-representation of women in government, business and elsewhere, criticizing in particular what they consider to be merely rhetorical support for women's equality within the major political parties.<sup>18</sup>

It will be interesting to see whether this increased feminist consciousness will find its expression in the cultural sphere, as it has further afield. I recently attended a performance by a Cape Town-based group called 'Women Unite', a band made up of eight black women operating under the motto 'Sisters are doing it on their own', and explicitly predicated on feminist principles: among others, a desire to develop leadership qualities amongst women 'by encouraging them to empower themselves to become independent', and to educate and raise awareness about pressing social issues, with emphasis on those particularly affecting women.<sup>19</sup> It remains to be seen whether more South African women will use popular music as a platform for feminist activism and awareness, and as a space where female role models can bring issues affecting girls and women squarely into the realm of popular discourse.

Finally, I would like to return to the idea of memory to which I alluded at the start. As I have found in my work on Holocaust song, music is not only itself a subject of historical memory, but is also, perhaps more significantly, a vehicle for the *transmission* of memory. It often plays a prominent role in ceremonies of remembrance and commemoration, and is used to accompany films, documentaries and other retrospective representations of historical events. The popular songs of the anti-apartheid struggle are becoming an integral part of how apartheid is popularly historicized and remembered, particularly with movies like *Amandla!* and the recent CD-radio documentary *South African Freedom Songs*. The songs are compelling to the popular imagination, not least because they introduce a discourse about apartheid that is evocative, emotional, affirmative and redemptive.<sup>20</sup> Narrating the *South African Freedom Songs* radio documentary, for example, Lucie Pagé declares: 'With the freedom songs, a nation unites and expresses itself. The songs reflect the rage, the suffering, the determination, the hope and the will of a nation.' Introducing a book on songs and struggle, Mbongeni Ngema and Duma Ndlovu write: 'As sure as the sun rises, whenever there is an occasion to celebrate or to mourn, you can rest assured that South Africa will always sing. [...] Songs of struggle, she will sing, songs of freedom.' One hears countless phrases in a similar vein: 'You had to sing to keep yourself alive,' 'You can't stop a nation from singing,' and so forth.<sup>21</sup>

There is no doubt that song played an important role in the liberation struggle, and many have attested to its value in mobilizing communities, uniting fighters, and helping to garner



international support for the fight against apartheid. Nonetheless, the stories that songs can tell us about the societies they not only represent but also actively participate in, are often more complicated than one-dimensional stories of heroic resistance suggest. It is worth thinking about how certain songs colour or shape our histories; how some have already become emblematic of the struggle, while others might quickly recede into obscurity. While certain versions of Holocaust history have become entrenched in the popular imagination, apartheid histories are still very much in the process of being formed. Which of the songs will be represented in those histories? Will songs of the armed struggle and MK dominate our communal memories, as resistance songs are wont to do? Or can we probe songs for the diverse stories they can tell about the communities that spawned them? Finally, as far as the specific subject of our discussion is concerned, which will be the representations of women's experiences that will be kept alive most prominently in the imaginations of future generations, and what kind of role might song play in the construction of that history?

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- <sup>1</sup> This chapter represents the initial stages of an ongoing project and is based on a preliminary survey of secondary sources only.
  - <sup>2</sup> Belinda Bozzoli dismisses the idea of 'triple oppression' as 'a vacuous concept with no inherent capacity to explain the relationships between these forces'; Belinda Bozzoli: *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1991, p. 239. While the term is perhaps simplistic – race, class, and gender are complex and potentially ambiguous concepts, and cannot be understood as 'neatly encapsulated, if intersecting, systems' – I have nonetheless introduced the term here as a useful starting point for understanding the multiple levels of discrimination directed at black women in apartheid society.
  - <sup>3</sup> See *South African Freedom Songs: Inspiration for Liberation* [sound recording]. Cape Town: Making Music Productions, 2000, for example, for songs like 'Sizakuba Dubula', 'Sizo Ngena', 'Shayalan Amabala', and 'Ayanqikaza', which emphasize MK's heroic armed struggle against the apartheid government.
  - <sup>4</sup> Cited in Jacklyn Cock: *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 223-5.
  - <sup>5</sup> Jacklyn Cock: *Colonels and Cadres*, p. 167. Women's prominence and visibility in the struggle against apartheid have been well documented elsewhere. See, for example, Amanda Gouws and Rhoda Kadalie: 'Women in the Struggle: The Past and the Future', in: *The Long March: The Story of the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa*. Pretoria: Haum, 1994, pp. 213-26; Cherryl Walker: *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. Johannesburg: David Philip, 1991; and Julia C. Wells: *We Now Demand: The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993.
  - <sup>6</sup> Tom Lodge: *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983, p. 139.
  - <sup>7</sup> Cited in Alton B. Pollard III: 'Rhythms of Resistance: The Role of Freedom Song in South Africa', in: *'This is How we Flow': Rhythm in Black Cultures*, ed. Angela M.S. Nelson. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999, p. 104.
  - <sup>8</sup> Tom Lodge: *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, p. 144.
  - <sup>9</sup> Cherryl Walker: *Women and Resistance*, p. xix.
  - <sup>10</sup> Julia C. Wells: 'The Rise and Fall of Motherism as a Force in Black Women's Resistance Movements',

conference paper presented at *Women and Gender in Southern Africa*, University of Natal, Durban, 30 January-2 February 1991, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Jacklyn Cock: *Colonels and Cadres*, pp. 46-51; Cherryl Walker: *Women and Resistance*, p. 199.

<sup>12</sup> Cherryl Walker: *Women and Resistance*, pp. xix-xx.

<sup>13</sup> Describing the uneasy relationship of black women to the feminist movement, Cock writes that there was 'widespread suspicion and rejection of feminism as anti-men or as bourgeois and divisive, as essentially reformist and concerned with entrenching and extending privilege. These criticisms of feminism are common in a Third World context, where matters of survival are paramount. [...] Furthermore, there is resistance to the Western feminist critique of the family as a source of women's oppression. In the South African context, the migrant labour system and a mass of laws – from the Group Areas Act to influx control – have destroyed African family life. The African family is widely viewed as an arena to be defended against the encroachments of the apartheid state.' Jacklyn Cock: *Colonels and Cadres*, p. 47.

<sup>14</sup> Cherryl Walker: *Women and Resistance*, p. xiv.

<sup>15</sup> This could also be argued, for example, in the case of those black women musicians (most prominent among them Miriam Makeba) who moved on from humble township beginnings to stellar international careers, and who quite literally used their voices to promote the anti-apartheid cause, particularly outside South Africa. In most cases, however, the struggle of these women was that of national liberation rather than women's equality. For more on Makeba, see for example Miriam Makeba with James Hall: *Makeba: My Story*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1988; and Z.B. Molefe: *A Common Hunger to Sing: A Tribute to South Africa's Black Women of Song, 1950 to 1990*. Cape Town: Kwela, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> See 'Umzabalazo' in Margaret Hamilton, ed.: *Sing Freedom! Songs of South African Life*. London: Novello, 1993, p. 27. Hamilton titles the song in English, 'We are the Women'.

<sup>17</sup> This modified version of 'Malibongwe', for example, appears on an Adhoc Women's Committee song-sheet from the 1980s: 'Lihambile/ Igohra lamakosikazi lihambile/ Malibongwe/ Igama lamakosikazi/ Zibotshiwe/ Inkokeli zethu zibotshiwe/ Mazilandwe/ Inkokeli zethu/ Kwana eVrystata ipasi/ Liyatshiswa.' (The hero of the women has passed on/ The names of the women, praise them/ Our leaders have been imprisoned/ Release them, our leaders/ In the Free State, the passes/ Burn them.) *South African Freedom Songs: A Collection of Song-Sheets from the 1980s*, archival collection at the University of Cape Town, p. 72. Another version of the song 'praises women while reinforcing traditional gender role expectations': 'Khaya bakulindle/ Malibongwe/ igama lamakosikazi/ Akukho ntomb' esakimfazwe.' (They are waiting for you at home/ Praise be to women/ No woman is afraid of the revolution). Cited in Alton B. Pollard III: 'Rhythms of Resistance', p. 119.

<sup>18</sup> Amanda Gouws and Rhoda Kadalie: 'Women in the Struggle', pp. 213-20.

<sup>19</sup> For a brief biography of 'Women Unite' and a summary of the group's aims and objectives, see [www.music.org.za/artists/womenunite/](http://www.music.org.za/artists/womenunite/). See also <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/dpa/monpaper/98-no35/women.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> I use the word 'redemptive' here in a twofold sense. First, in the context of the victims of apartheid, music is seen to redeem a measure of humanity and dignity at a time when the system regarded them as barely human. I also use the term with regard to the generations who will historicize and remember apartheid: music helps to redeem that history, casting it in an affirmative and optimistic light, and restoring faith in what is commonly vaunted as the 'triumph of the human spirit'.

<sup>21</sup> The quoted statements have been drawn from the following publications: *South African Freedom Songs: Inspiration for Liberation; Amandla!* [sound recording, CD liner notes]. USA: ATO Records, 2003; Mbongeni Ngema and Duma Ndlovu: 'Introduction', in: Helen Q. Kivnick: *Where is the Way: Song and Struggle in South Africa*. New York: Penguin, 1990, xiii; Margaret Hamilton, ed.: *Sing Freedom!*.

# 'TO HELL WITH HOME AND SHAME!': JAZZ, GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE DRUM JOURNALISM OF TODD MATSHIKIZA, 1951-1957

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Brett Pyper

Looking back over the past half-century, it is hard to miss – in Robert G. O'Meally's apt phrase – the 'jazz cadence' of the urban African culture that has endured as a poignant countermelody set against the consolidation and, belatedly, the disintegration, of apartheid.<sup>1</sup> In the 1940s and '50s in particular, the sounds of swing and bebop were in the air in black townships across the country at the very moment that the newly installed Afrikaner nationalist government was relentlessly implementing its racist policies. As the cultural asymmetries of British colonialism came to be overlaid and reconfigured by competing structures of white domination, many South Africans of colour looked to America, and in particular to black America, for ways of being in the world that could be reduced neither to the canons of English decorum nor to apartheid's imposed and essentialized tribal ethnicities.

As the pioneering work of David Coplan, Christopher Ballantine and, more recently, Lara Allen has demonstrated, jazz music served several of these cultural imperatives particularly effectively. Evidence of this process is often quoted from a particularly significant source: the landmark pictorial and literary publication first published in Johannesburg in March 1951 as *The African Drum*. After a faltering start, *Drum*, as it soon came to be renamed, went on to be published in regional editions in much of Anglophone West, Central and East Africa, lending some credence to its publishers' claims to becoming 'Africa's leading magazine.' Since its demise as an independent publication in the mid-1960s, *Drum* has been the object of extensive literary and scholarly commentary, significantly informing extant accounts of mid-twentieth-century South African culture and performance. This chapter highlights the evidence offered by the magazine of a culturally and historically specific reframing of jazz in South Africa, both as a musical genre and as a meta-musical discourse, and the role of discursive constructions of gender and sexuality in this process. On the pages of *Drum*, I suggest, one can observe South Africans not only writing *about* jazz, but writing *with* it; taking up a set of American-derived styles of music, attitudes and social comportment, and then elaborating them and interpolating them within their struggles and their play. That the vibrant cultural self-assertion of South Africa's celebrated jazz subcultures was shot through with gendered power relations is particularly well illustrated in the popular press, of which *Drum* was such a prominent example. Though obviously part of a broader phenomenon than the one on which I have space to focus here, these cultural dynamics can engagingly be observed in a series of interviews, reminiscences, and historical pieces written for the magazine by Todd Matshikiza during the course of the 1950s.<sup>2</sup>

### Todd Matshikiza, *Matshikese* and writing jazz

A member of a musically prominent, middle-class family from the Eastern Cape province, Matshikiza was a sought-after music teacher and a talented writer, in addition to being a gifted jazz musician. One *Drum* editor famously averred that he ‘thought and spoke in jazz and exclamation marks,’<sup>3</sup> while another noted that he handled his typewriter ‘as if it were a cross between a saxophone and a machine gun.’<sup>4</sup> Not only did he significantly reshape musical coverage in the magazine during its formative years, Matshikiza himself become a major protagonist of the developments about which he wrote. As a musician and composer, he is perhaps best known for his role in writing much of the score for the musical *King Kong*, based on the true-life tragedy of local boxer Ezekiel ‘King Kong’ Dlamini. The production famously featured the young Miriam Makeba in a major role, and broke new ground for South African theatre in the late 1950s, running on London’s West End and on Broadway, thereby effectively providing an exit pass for a generation of South African musicians as the political situation worsened after the Sharpeville massacre in March 1960.

As a literary figure Matshikiza has received relatively little attention from historians and critics who have examined the work of the so-called *Drum* writers.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, between joining the permanent staff of *Drum* in 1951 and leaving in 1957, he made a substantial contribution to the overall tone of the magazine. He dominated coverage of music on its pages, leaving a body of work that is not only historically informative, but telling for the ways in which it illustrates the cultural elaboration of jazz in the milieu about and for which he wrote. In what follows I will foreground Matshikiza’s contribution to our understanding of South African jazz history, both in terms of the content of his account and in terms of his idiosyncratic approach to ‘writing jazz,’ a style that his newsroom colleagues dubbed ‘Matshikese.’ Critical attention to both the content and style of Matshikiza’s writing, and especially to the ways in which assumptions concerning gender and sexuality are implicated in his writerly elaborations, enable us, I think, to observe some of the ways in which imported American musical genres came to authorize and animate innovation in South African music and cultural style more generally.

During the course of his association with *Drum*, Todd Matshikiza wrote much more than music reviews. He also penned several historical essays which usefully encapsulate the emergence of various elements that had become defining features of the South African jazz tradition. One such element, the relatively upscale institution of so-called ‘Concert and Dance’ parties at which live performances of American swing predominated, is a major focus of Christopher Ballantine’s monograph *Marabi Nights*, and requires little further explication here.<sup>6</sup> These nightlong offerings of vaudeville entertainment followed by social dancing to live jazz accompaniment were directly shaped by the curfew restrictions imposed on black city dwellers, and were presented by professional touring groups which often (as Ballantine has shown elsewhere) included women as instrumentalists and even band leaders.<sup>7</sup> In this milieu jazz attained a degree of respectability, sometimes becoming associated with black cultural and even political advancement. For my present purposes, the Concert and Dance setting is of primary significance for what it is set off against in Matshikiza’s account: the cultural expressions of the working classes with whom black middle-class socialites lived cheek by jowl in South Africa’s racially segregated urban areas.

In tracing the early history of jazz in South Africa, Matshikiza did not limit his attention to local big bands playing American swing at upscale venues, but dwelt at length on musicians associated with the country's slumyard low life. In grounding his account of local jazz in so-called *marabi* music in particular, Matshikiza foregrounded a very different, vernacular line of influence from that represented by bands who modelled their performances on imported recordings. He offered what in retrospect is one of the earliest and most authoritative definitions of a profoundly influential urban African musical genre that was central to the emergence of South African jazz:

'Marabi' is the name given to the 'hot,' highly rhythmic repetitive single-themed dance tunes of the late twenties. The tunes were largely the illiterate improvisations of the musicians of the day. 'Marabi' is also the name of an epoch. A period when a variety of spontaneous music and accentuated rhythms were sweeping the African entertainment world like wild fire, and everybody was singing and dancing to a type of Jazz that flourished in the 'dives' and not so 'classy' places – the not-so-posh entertainment houses and private parties.<sup>8</sup>

One should note in passing the significance of the label 'jazz' in referring to this music, for it points towards American jazz coming to be understood as being akin to, or even serving as an umbrella term for, neo-traditional African musical practices that could be related to it indirectly, if at all.<sup>9</sup> Matshikiza's accounts of *marabi* demonstrate that jazz offered a way of emulating and absorbing imported American influences, while simultaneously accessing a wide variety of indigenous and syncretic musical material. More pertinent to my concerns in this chapter, though, is the consideration that the social location in which Matshikiza in part situates the emergence of South African jazz could with substantial justification be described as feminised social space.

Sociologists and historians have long made the point that despite the chronic poverty, lack of services and exorbitant rents attending South Africa's urbanization, most urban Africans have preferred to stay in what were known between the 1920s and the 1940s as the slumyards close to town, rather than in the municipal housing provided at some distance from the city centres. Commentators have argued that a relative lack of official supervision in the slumyards gave the people who lived there an opportunity to adapt socially and culturally to the urban environment with some degree of autonomy. Equally important, under regulations which largely proscribed black economic enterprise, the slumyards were the centre of what was the most important local home industry, the illicit preparation and sale of beer and liquor, a domain that was to a significant extent the preserve of women. Anthropologists and historians have similarly long recognized that beer is not only a food, but also an economic and social currency among many indigenous African peoples, and that it is used to thank, reward, reconcile, ritually cleanse, honour, entertain and generally bind people together.<sup>10</sup> These traditional modes of sociability offered a means of maintaining a sense of social cohesion in urban centres, where official tendencies to pathologize and suppress the so-called liquor trade became a leitmotiv of municipal administration.<sup>11</sup> Given the absence of legal recreational facilities where alcohol could be consumed, private rooms were turned into public drinking houses or speakeasies called *shebeens*, typically presided over by a female hostess, whose social and material status soon was typecast in the slumyard persona of the so-called 'shebeen queen.' The preparation of beer was, significantly, a gendered African

tradition; custom prescribed that women should brew it for their spouses, and this was expected from those relatively few women who were able to accompany their husbands to the cities, regardless of legal prohibition. In the urban contexts in which many women found themselves, performing this role for strangers in the context of a cash economy offered one of the few avenues for financial independence and advancement, and shebeen queens were among the first significant patrons of marabi and/or jazz musicians.<sup>12</sup>

Matshikiza offers an evocative and informative description of a marabi performance in the first of a series of articles written for *Drum* in 1957 subtitled 'Our Jazz and the Black stars who make it.' Illustrating the extension of South Africa's fledgling jazz culture beyond the urban centres like Johannesburg and Cape Town with which it is primarily associated, Matshikiza begins this account in his home town of Queenstown in the Eastern Cape, a provincial centre that exemplified the increasing interpenetration of urban and rural worlds, and whose conflicting cultural currents were embodied in the person of a local 'jazz organist' named Boet [Brother] Gashe. This description of a marabi performance (or *Tswari* as it is called here; a creolization of 'soirée') conveys, from a middle-class child's perspective, a sense of forbidden fascination with the milieu with which the music was associated.

He was the only jazz organist. No pianos in those days. His organ was carted on a donkey truck from house to house, and wherever it moved, the people went. Queenstown was happily situated for Gashe because every train bearing miners ('mine boys' in South African English) between the Eastern Cape and Johannesburg stopped there overnight. And the miners' veins were full with jazz, as they were with women, and they got both at Gashe's sessions ... Gashe's dances were called 'I-Tswari' where you paid 3d. at the door and entered into a dingy, stuffy room where the dust from the dancers' feet smothered the solitary paraffin lamp which flickered in the shadows of dancing partners who could hardly see or didn't know each other. The hostess hunched next to a four-gallon tin of beer in the corner. She sold jam tins full at 6d. a gulp and held her hand open for another 1s. if the client wanted to go into the room behind the curtain. But actually one saw nothing in that dust. Not even Gashe, who was bent over his organ in one corner, thumping the rhythm from the pedals with his feet, which were also feeding the organ with air; choking the organ with persistent chords in the right hand, and improvising for an effective melody with his left hand. He would call in the aid of a matchstick to hold down a harmony note, usually the tonic (doh) or the dominant (soh), both of which persist in African music, and you get a delirious effect of perpetual motion. Perpetual motion. Perpetual motion in a musty hole where a man makes friends without restraint.<sup>13</sup>

Leaving aside for the moment the evident tendency towards the sensational in foregrounding the association between marabi/jazz, alcohol and non-conjugal sex, I would like to draw attention to some formal features of Matshikiza's writing, the most obvious here being the threefold repetition of the phrase 'perpetual motion' in describing Gashe's playing. Looking over Matshikiza's *Drum* columns, his mannerist style of writing can be seen (or rather heard) to stem from a deliberate attempt to musicalize his prose. Here is an example from a record review of 1955:



There's a big surprise in the mixed 'bag' of hits that Dotty came especially from Bulawayo to do for the Troubadour label. This 'yippity - woo - biddy-hi-de-ho' crooning lass cast off her intimate night club style for two discs, to do ... hymns. It's always a pleasant shocker to hear a jazz voice doing the most modest pious Sunday morning fare and giving it a bang.<sup>14</sup>

Matshikiza's musical writing was by no means limited to onomatopoeic effects. Notice the more abrupt, call-and-response patterns of rhythm and rhyme in a profile piece titled 'What They Say About Tandi!', where the opening interaction between interviewer and interviewee could be compared with trading fours, and then two's, in jazz:

I said to Tandi, 'Where you born, Sister?' She said, 'Turffontein Mister.' I said, 'You're cute.' She said, 'Shoot.'

This is what I shot out of her. She's the biggest, heppest, and jivest of a family of nine.<sup>15</sup>

Writing such as this is recurrently interwoven with Matshikiza's journalistic documentation of South Africa's nascent jazz culture, adding an element of swing not only to *Drum's* music features, but to the magazine as a whole.

However, to return to Matshikiza's characterization of the miners' veins which were 'full with jazz, as they were with women,' it is hard, given contemporary sensibilities at least, not to notice a reciprocal sexualization of jazz music and of female subjects as a pervasive feature of Matshikiza's writing for *Drum*. In endeavouring to write jazzily, Matshikiza strikingly deploys a gendered, and even a sexist, vocabulary, and this way of writing in turn feeds back into his accounts of South African jazz history. In the review of 'Dotty,' the much-admired vocalist Dorothy Masuka, recording hymns quoted above, jazz is explicitly framed as secular, energetic and the converse of religious sobriety (though scholars have increasingly recognized the influence of African-American sacred musics on the development of early jazz). Doubtless, much of Matshikiza's writing is overtly playful; in passages like the following, jazz connotes a certain flirtatiousness that accompanies a positive assessment of musical prowess:

Don't let this picture fool you. It is the sombre, dolorous and docile portrait of a lively living bubbling brook of a hep [*sic*] cat, Mabel Mafuya. The Jazziest twenty-four inch waist I've seen in a recording studio. And what can you get in a wiggly waggly twenty-four inch waist that heps and jives and dashes behind [a] partition to rehearse the next verse in the middle of the recording session? Lots. You get her Troubadour AFC 353 that paints the grim grime of a miner's life in jumping tones.<sup>16</sup>

There is a sense in which the exaggerated sexuality of Matshikiza's female subjects has a tongue-in-cheek quality about it, becoming an ironic Americanism that quotes and plays on existing mass-mediated representations of jazz even as it reproduces them. Nevertheless, there is little denying that this mode of characterizing female sexuality in a jazz milieu was implicated in the uncritical reproduction of a broader economy of representation that has been widely diagnosed in portrayals of jazz music in American film and the international mass media. Several commentators have, moreover, drawn specific attention to the objectification of women in *Drum's* covers, photo features and advertisements; the absence of women writers from its staff; and the sexism, sometimes bordering on misogyny, of some of its content.<sup>17</sup>

Matshikiza's writing is unquestionably complicit in this, and amply demonstrates that jazz was framed in South Africa, as it was in the United States, as a gendered discourse during the 1950s. As I have already mentioned, this appears to have marked something of a departure from precedents set during the preceding two decades in South Africa, where, as Ballantine has argued, women enjoyed a relative degree of professional equality in the emergent local jazz scene. It is intriguing, then, to find a musician whose post-Victorian upbringing in Queenstown would in part have exposed him to jazz music in its more respectable manifestations, emphasizing this music's associations with hyper-sexualised characters from working-class life.

Perhaps this refraction of Matshikiza's own likely experience of South African jazz culture can simply be ascribed to him toeing the editorial line at *Drum*, where there is evidence that a certain degree of drinking and sexual braggadocio enabled male bonding across sometimes fraught inter-racial lines. But beyond the mere prurient association of marabi and/or jazz with sexual license, one might also discern some real anxiety in Matshikiza's writing about the emergence around shebeens of modes of female autonomy unfettered by either the canons of patriarchal tradition or of ostensibly modern domestic propriety. This unease is captured in a final quotation from which I have gleaned my title, in which three images strikingly cross-reference one another: Johannesburg, the purported 'Golden City,' a pathologized female subjectivity, and modernity writ large:

Marabi ... Dark days when partners didn't dance cheek to cheek or nose to nose. That was too tame. The girl danced by herself. Wild. Furious. Agitated. Shaking. Foaming. Sick. Announcing the modern age and golden pavements. To hell with home and shame!<sup>18</sup>

At some risk of ascribing a fairly general feature of *Drum's* editorial style to an individual author, I have endeavoured in this paper to show Todd Matshikiza's literary creativity as having in part been enabled by his deployment of sexualised and gendered images in characterizing South Africa's early jazz milieu. If jazz as a genre proved particularly amenable to this type of representation, this was because it so potently encoded racially and sexually liberatory impulses. Yet such discursive encoding of musical experience itself contained complex entanglements of racial and sexual power. What emerges from Matshikiza's writing, beyond the history that he recounts on the pages of *Drum*, is that jazz furnished black South Africans with a potent metaphor for reinventing themselves – in short, for improvising – in circumstances that seemed increasingly inimical to celebration and play. The jazz-like qualities that I have discerned in his writing communicate an ethos of risk-taking and experimentation that in some respects uncritically reproduced imported stereotypes, particularly those that reinforced local patriarchal values, but in others entailed creative ways of enunciating modern African experience in an international, Afro-diasporic musical language. For all its contradictions, the jazz culture of and with which he wrote had come to express a distinctive South African sensibility, one in which gendered hierarchies were reinscribed in the very process of resisting racial ones.



I would like to thank Lara Allen for her valuable assistance in locating several of the sources referred to in this chapter and her useful comments on earlier versions of this paper. Thanks also to John Matshikiza for our ongoing discussions of his father's work and contemporary South African culture in general. An earlier version of this paper appeared in the African arts magazine, *Glendora Review*, 2003 (in press).

- <sup>1</sup> The reference here is to Robert G. O'Meally's use of the phrase in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, which is in turn adapted from African-American literary critic Stephen Henderson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- <sup>2</sup> Though a descendent of *Drum* still appears on South African news stands under the same title today, the magazine was marginalized and reshaped after suffering bans and other government restrictions from 1965 until 1979, when the original owner, Jim Bailey, finally sold it to a conglomerate of South African publishing houses. For a concise history of the publication, as well as an invaluable guide to the magazine in its heyday, see Dorothy Woodson's *Drum: An Index to 'Africa's Leading Magazine' 1951-1965*. University of Wisconsin, 1988. For literary commentary on the *Drum* writers, who included Can Themba, Bloke Modisane, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Nat Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi, Arthur Maimane, Casey Motsisi and Richard Rive, see Anthony Sampson's *Drum: A Venture into the New Africa*. London: Collins, 1956; Mike Nicol's *A Good Looking Corpse*. London: Minerva, 1995 (1991); Rob Nixon's *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*; and Michael Chapman's *The Drum Decade: Stories from the 1950s*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001 (1989), which contains a more extensive and updated bibliography.
- <sup>3</sup> Sampson: *Drum*, p. 27.
- <sup>4</sup> Tom Hopkinson: *In the Fiery Continent*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1962, p. 87.
- <sup>5</sup> The tendency has been to emphasize the short fiction published in the magazine, hereby overlooking Matshikiza's numerous feature and review articles. His single novel, *Chocolates For My Wife*, was published in London in 1961 by Hodder and Stoughton.
- <sup>6</sup> Christopher Ballantine: 'Concert and Dance: The Foundations of Black Jazz in South Africa Between the 1920s and the Early 1940s', in: *Marabi Nights: Early South African Jazz and Vaudeville*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993, pp. 11-38.
- <sup>7</sup> Christopher Ballantine: 'Gender, Migrancy, and South African Popular Music in the Late 1940s and the 1950s', in: *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2000, pp. 376-407.
- <sup>8</sup> Todd Matshikiza: 'Twenty Years of Jazz', in: *Drum*, December 1951, pp. 26-7.
- <sup>9</sup> Much like legendary figures of New Orleans jazz like Buddy Bolden, who lie just behind the horizon of historical documentation, the musical styles associated with marabi were never recorded in their original form, nor described in anything but the most cursory manner. See Ballantine: *Marabi Nights*, *ibid*.
- <sup>10</sup> This formulation is quoted in David Coplan: *In Township Tonight!* Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985, p. 92.
- <sup>11</sup> See Paul La Hausse: *Brewers, Beerhalls and Boycotts : A History of Liquor in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1988.
- <sup>12</sup> Mary Rörich: 'Shebeens, Slumyards and Sophiatown. Black Women, Music and Cultural Change in Urban South Africa c 1920-1960', in: *The World of Music*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1989, pp. 78-101; Lara Victoria Allen: *Representation, Gender and Women in Black South African Popular Music, 1948-1960*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 2000.
- <sup>13</sup> Todd Matshikiza: 'Stars of Jazz', in: *Drum*, June 1957, pp. 37-43.
- <sup>14</sup> Todd Matshikiza: 'Gramo Go Round by Hot Toddy', in: *Drum*, December 1955, p. 79.
- <sup>15</sup> Todd Matshikiza: 'What They Say About Tandi!', in: *Drum*, December 1954. The 'Thandi' referred to in the title is Thandi Mpambani (later Klaasens).
- <sup>16</sup> Todd Matshikiza: 'Gramo Go Round by Hot Toddy', in: *Drum*, February 1956, p. 73.

<sup>17</sup> See Rob Nixon: *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, p. 20; and especially Dorothy Driver: 'Drum Magazine (1951-99) and the Spatial Configurations of Gender', in: *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*, Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall, eds., London and New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 231-42; and Allen, *Representation, Gender and Women in Black South African Popular Music, 1948-1960*, pp. 102-7. Driver's reading of representations of women in *Drum* interestingly ascribes greater agency to jazz singers than other types of female subjects.

<sup>18</sup> Todd Matshikiza: 'Jazzmo Antonio Saude', in: *Drum*, April 1955, pp. 40-1.

# ETHNICITY, SEXUALITY AND ALL THAT JAZZ: THE MUSICAL TEXT AS CONFESSIONAL SPACE

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Nishlyn Ramanna

In the children's book *Dr Dolittle*, there is an odd, two-headed, horse-like animal called the 'pushmepullyou' and, in this paper, I feel like a musical version of the fictional creature. On the one hand, I write as a 'new musicologist,' but on the other – rather more minoritarianly – as a gay, Indian, jazz pianist-composer. The latter wants to explain how the scales or ragas, which underlie a set of pieces I wrote in 1995, secretly perform an ethnic and sexual identity, while the former would like to outline a theoretical context against which these claims might be made.

First, then, the musicologist's narrative:

About ten years ago, I encountered Christopher Ballantine's work on music and society<sup>1</sup> and, ever since, I have been intrigued by the interrelationships of musical sound and social meaning. However, I had difficulty transposing the 'socio-musical' perspectives on the music of Bach, Beethoven or Madonna by writers like Ballantine or Susan McClary<sup>2</sup> to my own modest, everyday music-making activities. Consequently, I set about in my Master's research to try and locate myself theoretically as a performer and composer of jazz within the larger academic debate on music and social meaning.

Drawing primarily on the work of Robert Walser<sup>3</sup> and Chris Weedon,<sup>4</sup> I argued that the concept of discourse – conceived of as a polyphonic sociocultural totality and a dialectically constituted system of utterances – enables an investigation of the ways in which social processes inhere in musical processes. Taking this as a point of departure, I then proposed that music's instances express social meanings – and so function as utterances – by virtue of their dual occurrence within systems of intra- and intertextual relationships and processes of dialectical interaction between texts and social contexts.

This conception of musical meaning is elegantly expressed by Richard Middleton, who observes that 'music ... offers a means of thinking relationships, both within a work and between works, and perhaps between these and non-musical structures. Musical patterns are saying: as this note is to that note, as tonic is to dominant, as ascent is to descent, as accent is to weak beat (and so on), so X is to Y.'<sup>5</sup> Importantly, however, music is not merely a mimetic or metaphoric entity. Rather, as Walser emphasizes, 'music is not just a symbolic register for what really happens elsewhere [but] is itself a material, social practice wherein subject positions are enacted and transgressed and ideologies are developed and interrogated.'<sup>6</sup>

This idea is often explored in the musicological literature, although claims about music and meaning are typically made apart from instances of specific performances of particular pieces to specific listeners in specific venues. For example, in his 'satellite-image' examination of Western music since circa 1600, Shepherd argues that 'the characteristics of functional tonality

as the “language” of classical music [embody] and [give] expression to the temporal and spatial senses underlying and making possible industrial capitalism as a social form.’<sup>7</sup> Extending this argument, he proposes that in their variously acquiescent/resistive articulation of functional tonal principles, ‘many genres of popular music may be understood as sites in which struggles relative to the acceptance or rejection of many features of capitalist social structures and ideologies have been played out.’<sup>8</sup> Also casting his descriptive net rather widely, Christopher Small observes that an industrial/scientific worldview ‘permeates [much] large-scale public musicking that takes place in the Western industrial world.’<sup>9</sup>

Offering more textually-anchored analyses, scholars like Walser,<sup>10</sup> Tomlinson<sup>11</sup> and Monson<sup>12</sup> show how narratives of ‘double-consciousness’<sup>13</sup> (Du Bois’s term for African-Americans’ complex experience of having to inhabit and endure an inhospitable and White-dominated West) find musical expression via the ‘Signifyin’ practices which pervade black musical genres such as jazz, funk, soul, gospel, etc.<sup>14</sup> A comparable bridging of the musical/extra-musical chasm is accomplished by Bach scholar Michael Marissen.<sup>15</sup> In his detailed and carefully substantiated exposition of the ‘hierarchy-questioning aspects of the scorings and forms in [Bach’s Brandenburg] concertos’, Marissen shows how Bach, inspired by Lutheran notions of equality in the afterlife, proffers a musical counter-narrative to (then) prevailing discourses of social hierarchy.

Drawing on ethnographic data in the form of interviews with musicians and concert-goers, I have similarly found intimate connections between aspects of text and context in my Master’s research. Guitarist (and interviewee) Mageshen Naidoo’s comments on his composition *G Force* are particularly revealing of the ways in which musical texts metaphorically index extra-musical experience:

With *G Force* ... I knew that I wanted a sound that wasn’t entirely stable ... that someone couldn’t hold onto. I don’t know if you’ve experienced this in [playing] *G Force* [but] it’s always like it’s very unsettled.

[NR] That’s probably because it’s built around a diminished-whole-tone scale.

I guess so, but [it’s] also [because] of that [G7] sharp 9 chord that wants to go somewhere. I thought about it being a dominant of C but not resolving. And, it doesn’t ever resolve. That’s one of the reasons I called it ‘G Force’ [because of] this pulling effect. It was also a personal thing in my life ‘cause I was going through some personal hassles. There was this big fight and this personal issue [began to affect] everything that I used to do in church. It became such a problem that I considered stepping down from my duties in church. I found myself doing things that I wouldn’t ordinarily do, like not going to church and stuff like that. So, the ‘G’ in ‘G Force’ is also God: there was this pulling between the force that the Church and God had on me and where this problem was taking me.

Moreover, the melodic, rhythmic and formal structures on which *G Force* is based underscore this feeling of ‘unsettledness’. First, because the melody is based on a (G) diminished whole tone scale, it includes the altered extensions of the (G) dominant 7th chord on which the composition is based. As such, the melody is rich in harmonic tensions. Secondly, the piece moves unpredictably between 16th and triplet subdivisions of the beat. Finally, the two-bar

phrase with which each of the solos ends (it is marked 'on cue' in the lead sheet) shatters the momentum of the groove, and thus also contributes to the piece's feeling of unsettledness.

In addition to their unusually clear exposition of text/context dialectics, Naidoo's comments also recall another recurrent theme in music scholarship: the notion of music as a 'problem-solving space'.

Often cited by ethnomusicologists (in particular), this idea is most eloquently expressed by David Coplan, who observes: 'In its condensed and virtual landscape, art orders the world as we would do if we could.'<sup>16</sup> Recounting Christopher Waterman's work, Veit Erlmann<sup>17</sup> likewise notes that 'through ordering temporal experience and by framing social interaction in a performance context, *jùjú* provides powerful, commonsense images of an ideal society marked by traditional hierarchy, cohesion and equal opportunity'. As Waterman succinctly puts it, 'good *jùjú* is good social order'.<sup>18</sup> Offering a comparable reading of *isicathamiya*, Erlmann argues that the genre's 'singers and dancers construct spaces that renounce the law of the given and now by asserting their own spatiotemporal order'.<sup>19</sup> The music then comes to function as the 'embodiment of an imagined order, located in a heroic past beyond the here and now and constructed through multisensory communicative means such as sound texture, dress and dance'.<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein, Christopher Small argues that 'the musicking that moves us most will be that which most subtly, comprehensively and powerfully articulates the relationships of our ideal society – which may or may not have any real, or even possible, existence beyond the duration of the performance'.<sup>21</sup> In the words of an old gospel song, 'I'm gonna live the life I sing about in my song!'<sup>22</sup>

At this point, I would like to shift the musicologist to the wings and call on stage the *charou*,<sup>23</sup> *moffie*<sup>24</sup> jazz composer. In the 1990s, when I enrolled at the University of Natal for a Bachelor of Music degree, I transitioned from a mostly ethnically-homogeneous and hetero-normative, apartheid-era Indian habitus into the more fluid, discursive spaces of a nascent 'New South Africa,' characterized by increasing interracial interaction and, I discovered as I came out to myself and fellow students, a more tolerant sexual politics than I had thus far experienced. This renegotiation of my ethnic and sexual identities was neither a smooth, nor easy, process: at the time it was a major preoccupation of mine and consequently found its way into the music I wrote. This is especially true of a set of raga-based 'Indo-jazz' pieces I wrote mostly in 1995.

By this time, I had come out to my family; I had forged a fairly large circle of gay and accepting straight friends and colleagues, many of whom regularly attended my gigs, and I wanted to write pieces which expressed who I was at the time and which (in part at least) musically 'addressed' this 'constituency'.

For listeners somewhat familiar with gay subculture, the titles of these pieces would have been read as consciously queer. 'Hymn to Him' (apologies for the corny title!) evokes images of homoerotic interaction, while 'Song for my Sister' plays on the 'Gayle' (i.e. gay lingo) term for a close, platonic gay male friend. In performance, in Durban, I would often dedicate the piece to a couple of special 'girlfriends' (this being another term for close, platonic gay male friends). A third piece, 'The Beautiful Room is Empty', borrows its title from the Edmund White novel in which the author narrates his experiences as a gay man in his twenties.

In this last part of the paper, I would now like to draw together my confessional and academic selves and outline the ways in which the biographical processes just discussed might be discursively encoded at the level of musical detail. I will do this by offering an intertextually contextualised musical analysis of the pieces to which I have referred.

In Western musical culture, the minor mode is often construed as the feminine and Oriental other of the major mode. Recognizing this, I tried to express a 'queer' sound at the level of the musical text by basing the melodies that I wrote on scale shapes which eschew major/minor binaries thereby 'escaping' this race-gender binarism. For example, part two of 'Hymn to Him' (Example 1) constantly shifts between major and minor versions of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of the scale:

#### EXAMPLE 1



'The Beautiful Room is Empty' (Example 2) is based predominantly on 'A' harmonic major (which incorporates a major 3<sup>rd</sup> and minor 6<sup>th</sup>):

#### EXAMPLE 2



(A) *Harmonic Major*



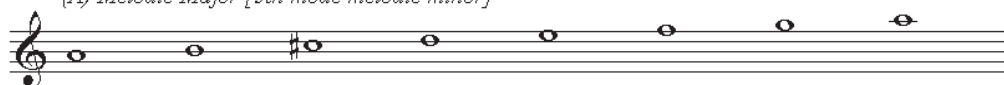
‘Song for my Sister’ (Example 3) plays around with the 5<sup>th</sup> mode of the melodic minor scale thereby creating a melodic-major sound again:

### EXAMPLE 3

(Bridge)



(A) *Melodic Major [5th mode melodic minor]*



Finally, ‘Pisces’ (Example 4) uses the following scale - F# G B C# D F – to produce a similar sense of major-minor ambiguity.

### EXAMPLE 4



I would like to emphasize that the arguments I make above are significantly limited by my exclusive focus on the processes of production and my lack of engagement with the meanings of these pieces at the level of reception. 'On its own,' music is semantically underdetermined and, ultimately, musical meaning emerges within the context of subjectively defined experiential fields (largely, but not exclusively) unique to historically-specific makers *and* listeners. Still, because these meanings are 'socially written,' they pertain to the sound patterns we perceive in ways that are personal, subtle and fluid, but almost always coherent, socially shared and, therefore, communicable. As such, music's affective power may be said to function non-arbitrarily (albeit enormously flexibly) *within* particular musical discourse communities.

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- <sup>1</sup> Christopher Ballantine: *Music and its Social Meanings*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984.
  - <sup>2</sup> See McClary's *Feminine Endings*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
  - <sup>3</sup> Robert Walser: *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993.
  - <sup>4</sup> Chris Weedon: *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997.
  - <sup>5</sup> Richard Middleton: *Studying Popular Music*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990, p. 223.
  - <sup>6</sup> Walser, *ibid.*, p. 33.
  - <sup>7</sup> John Shepherd: 'Music and Social Categories', in: Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, Richard Middleton, eds: *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2003, p. 73. See also Shepherd's 'Music and Male Hegemony', in: Richard Leppert and Susan McClary, eds: *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; and his *Music as Social Text*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
  - <sup>8</sup> Shepherd: 'Music and Social Categories', p. 128.
  - <sup>9</sup> Christopher Small: *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1998, p. 45.
  - <sup>10</sup> Robert Walser: "'Out of Notes": Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis', in: David Schwarz *et al.*, eds: *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinaryity, Culture*. Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1997, pp. 147-68.
  - <sup>11</sup> Gary Tomlinson: 'Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies', in: Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman, eds: *Disciplining Music: Musicology and its Canons*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 64-94.
  - <sup>12</sup> Ingrid Monson: *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*. London: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
  - <sup>13</sup> W.E.B du Bois: *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Dover, 1994.
  - <sup>14</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr.: *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
  - <sup>15</sup> Michael Marissen: *The Social and Religious Design of J.S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos*. Chichester, West Sussex: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 115.
  - <sup>16</sup> David Coplan: *In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa's Basotho Migrants*. London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 202.
  - <sup>17</sup> Veit Erlmann: *Nightsong: Performance, Power and Practice in South Africa*. London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 22.
  - <sup>18</sup> Christopher Waterman: *Jùjú: A Social History and Ethnography of an African Popular Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 220.
  - <sup>19</sup> Erlmann: *Nightsong*, p. 134.
  - <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98
  - <sup>21</sup> Christopher Small: *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music*. London: Calder, 1987, p. 70.



- <sup>22</sup> Ray Pratt: *Rhythm and Resistance: The Political Uses of American Popular Music*. London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990, p. 24.
- <sup>23</sup> South African slang for a person of Indian origin. When uttered by a non-Indian person, its use may be construed as derogatory, but it may also be 'signified' on, and used ironically, as I do here, by South Africans of Indian descent. See Henry Louis Gates: *The Signifying Monkey*.
- <sup>24</sup> South African slang for a gay man. As with the term referred to in note 23 above, this too may be considered pejorative when used by a non-gay person, but may also be used ironically, as I do here, by gay South African men.

# QUEER ALLIANCES

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Stephanus Muller

My most vivid memory of Howard Ferguson, whom I never knew well, is of an unexpected cry in his best Belfast accent: ‘To hell with the pope!’, followed by laughter at this example of how he could still ‘do’ a Northern Irish militant sectarian. It is 8 January 1998, and I am sitting in 51 Barton Road, Cambridge. I am visiting Ferguson at his home at my request. I had written to him and he has prepared for my visit with teacups that have been set out on the small, empty table in the small, clean kitchen. Howard is bald, fragile and generous. He is also relaxed. He shows me his recipe book, translated into Japanese, with none other than Mrs Huberte Rupert’s bobotie recipe among the dishes now enjoyed by millions of Japanese households. We talk about Arnold van Wyk, the reason for my visit. He answers my questions, sometimes referring me to articles he had written on Arnold. His patience is the more remarkable because I am wasting his time with excruciating little details and irrelevant, boring questions to which he has never known, or has forgotten, the answers. On that Thursday afternoon I was not aware that Arnold van Wyk was gay and, although I wanted to know, I was too embarrassed to ask the elderly gentleman sitting opposite me that specific question. This paper is about the meaning of that question that was not asked, and the meaning of it not being asked.

It is easy to forget that this was once a question and not just something I knew. I now know, because I have spoken to so many of Van Wyk’s colleagues, fellow academics, musicians, composers. I have also spoken to people who knew him all their lives, and knew him well, who did not know.

Kariena Hahn, daughter-in-law of Van Wyk’s eldest sibling, Minnie (Jacomina Maria van Wyk, later Hahn):

**Stephanus Muller:** Did you know that he was homosexual?

**Kariena Hahn:** You know, you are the first person to say that he was homosexual. We all knew it, or no, I lie when I say we knew. It was an assumption, but you are the first person to say that. Nobody said so. One suspected it or assumed it.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Guido Perold and his wife Charlotte (née Baron), life-long friends:

**Stephanus Muller:** You were aware that he was homosexual?

**Guido Perold:** No, I was not. Were you, Charlotte?

**Charlotte Perold:** Yes, I was.

**Guido Perold:** No, I was not, but I am a bit innocent in the ways of life. Fast with some things, and not with others.

**Charlotte Perold:** It was a 'closed shop' then. Now everyone talks, then you kept quiet.<sup>2</sup>

What does it matter anyway?

Have any important questions been answered by my knowledge? Have any *musical* questions been answered?

Perhaps I should reformulate the question. What is potentially to be gained by the knowledge that Arnold van Wyk was gay? At least there is a straightforward historical answer to the question. It allows one to trace and to write a repressed part of (music) history as part of a restorative process, a general imperative with regard to the many dead spots of South African history. An academic interest in sexuality need not be simply a listing and cataloguing exercise (for example, so-and-so was gay, this work and that have gay themes/texts/programmes) but one that can conceivably provide important insights into the relationships between specific social configurations (subcultures) here, and general historical currents. There is also a political answer to this same question, namely that this is a useful fact in the politics of gay criticism, or musicology, if you will. Useful in that it provides texts that can be demonstrated to occupy the margins of the dominant, and therefore the potential rallying points for an assertive subcultural criticism.

Another question: how did it come about that Afrikaner nationalism endorsed the music of gay men as consistent with and part of a nationalist narrative grounded in patriarchal mythology and the mythology of heterosexual normativity? An attempted answer would tell us something about the nature of Afrikaner nationalism, and something of the position occupied by certain kinds of musics in apartheid South Africa.

A more interesting question: why would people marginalized by a certain societal and political structure (such as gays in apartheid South Africa) actively help to promote the mythology of that structure, albeit in an indirect way? Here our answer would veer from the historical and sociological in the direction of psychology, although it is also possible that we may gain in our knowledge of music's unique status as a mode of ambiguous (and therefore also potentially gendered and sexualized) discourse, thus giving the question a critical theoretical twist. Subsequently we may also want to know if gay music can be considered an aesthetic category, and if so, what the criteria should be for inclusion and the inevitable exclusion. We are still in the domain of critical theory, but the musicological interest is now also apparent. Can Arnold van Wyk be called a gay composer, or was he a composer who happened to be gay? Can only gay people write gay music, or can straight people also write gay music, for example by setting homo-erotic texts to music? If we assume, safely enough I think, that not all gay people are the same, how do we distil defining characteristics for gay music? Does the possibility exist to generalize certain characteristics of gay music?

And how (and why) did *my* questions become *our* questions?

There is a risk of enlightened ridicule or indignant accusations of voyeurism when criticism becomes interested in the sexuality of its authorial subjects. It goes without saying that such an interest is a natural extension of the biographical method and genre, an anti-intellectual enterprise if ever there was one, if one were to believe Terry Eagleton.<sup>3</sup> And as biography and

art constitute contesting simultaneous spaces and texts, there is a sense in some quarters that sexuality is always peripheral to art, whether it be poetry or painting or music. It is of no import whether this interest is narrated according to what Alan Sinfield has called the 'discretion model', or whether there is an explicit gay focus in the work.<sup>4</sup> This point of view is greatly aided by research that does nothing but 'out' homosexual tendencies. In one example, Robert Aldrich's recent *Colonialism and Homosexuality* seems little more than lists of putative homosexuals, with scant evidence in many cases linking the individuals to homosexuality: Cecil Rhodes, Kitchener, Milner – to name only the names of interest to our place.<sup>5</sup> A sense of salacious scandal and improper revelation is added when the subject is broached in a society that, for many different reasons, maintains an almost Victorian silence on matters sexual.

The contrary view, namely that sexual orientation is central to an understanding of both art and artists, is also not uncommon. Afrikaans author Hennie Aucamp writes that

... I believe that the sexual orientation of a creator is a central ingredient of his creations, but that it cannot necessarily be identified. It is a sensibility that is felt, a 'third stream of consciousness', an aura.<sup>6</sup>

However, Aucamp's discussion of gay short prose dismisses the implication of aesthetic quality associated with an 'honest' expression of sexual orientation as opposed to the artifice of repressed sexuality.<sup>7</sup> This is not to deny what Aucamp calls the cultural-historical importance of the brave flouting of social taboos, but clearly to separate cultural-historical importance from aesthetic value, a point driven home by Ned Rorem:

Is there a perceptible difference between gay and straight composers? Male and female, cute and plain, black and white? Not as much as between good and bad composers, and even that's a matter of opinion.<sup>8</sup>

The dyads employed here, apart from 'cute and plain', are of clear political importance but of no immediate aesthetic relevance. This, at least, would be the view of mainstream criticism, which suggests that a focus on gender, sexuality or sexual orientation is fine (even necessary or desirable), but then it can no longer be called criticism in terms of whatever the texts are: literary criticism, musicology, etc. We would be stepping outside of what Stanley Fish has called the 'disciplinary performance'.<sup>9</sup> Aucamp's critical work is fascinating to read, as it displays the contradictory impulses of being both an analytically concise focus on a taboo subject and therefore consciously distanced from mainstream interests, as well as an overbearing concern to train that focus within the boundaries of the disciplinary performance. Relevance and political imperatives, he cautions, do not guarantee art. In sticking to the ideal of universality,<sup>10</sup> his critical practice is exemplary of a negotiated stance versus normative, dominant culture. It does seem as if there is a divergence between views of the value of certain texts because they are gay texts, and the value of texts as music/literature/visual art because they say something about the human condition in general. The latter view presupposes that gay themes or texts have something to offer the canon, which would be, I think, a view Aucamp would subscribe to, the former that gayness itself is as central a point of departure as any other (the position of this writer). This means that the mere presence of a gay sensibility in a text is a constitutive and displacing aesthetic phenomenon of no less importance than the more 'objective' aesthetic criteria with supposed 'universal' value, but also of no less significance to heterosexuality. 'It

is often asserted,' writes Alan Sinfield, 'that gay discretion is beneficial to literary culture.'<sup>11</sup> The alternative is of course a politically informed and motivated oppositional stance towards the dominant. It is perhaps not surprising that, in South African society, instinct and good sense dictate negotiated settlements in matters constitutional and otherwise.

An interview with Peter Klatzow, the Cape Town-based professor of composition, provides a personal perspective on the dynamic of the 'open secret' during apartheid by referring to some of the most important musical figures of the time:

Anton [Hartman, Head of Music of the SABC and member of the secret Afrikaner organization, the Broederbond] knew exactly what was going on, there was no problem about it. He never ever spoke about it. He never ever referred to anybody's sexuality at all; whether they were lesbian, whether they were homosexual, whatever it may have been, he had a distinctly hands-off position as far as that was concerned. He was interested only in their value as a symbol of Afrikaner success in a particular area. And from that point of view he was always extremely protective of Hubert [du Plessis] and Nols [Arnold van Wyk] in particular, both of whom he had a very cordial relationship with. They never, ever broached the issue that either of them might have been gay, you know, simply 'we don't talk about that'. So there was a kind of conspiracy of silence in a way, and I don't think that anybody ever made life difficult for Anton, because he was patronizing these two people who really lived an openly different life style.<sup>12</sup>

Like Klatzow, many of the composers (and performers and teachers) supported and fostered by the institutional structures of apartheid South Africa with its stultifyingly narrow and often hypocritical moralistic code, were gay men. It is an indication not so much of tolerance of what the mores of the time viewed as sexual deviancy, but rather hints at the possible acceptance that music (and the creators thereof) inevitably inhabited a libidinous space of erotic transgression beyond the control of the state. A relevant observation is made by Aucamp when he remarks on how often in world gay literature (he cites Thomas Mann, Tennessee Williams, Klaus Mann), the gay figure is a painter, a poet, a writer or a composer. He proceeds to ask: 'Is this a case of a conscious technique – the painter/poet as metaphor for a "different kind", with perhaps the hope that the artistic difference will absorb the sexual difference in the imagination of the reader?'<sup>13</sup> Is the same dynamic perhaps operative in the real world?

This does not explain, however, why gay people, marginalized by a certain societal and political structure, actively helped to promote the mythology of that structure, albeit in an indirect way. The disturbing thing about this, I would think, is that it implies a willingness by gay men to serve apartheid society regardless of the denial of their rights freely to live their lives as they chose and the palpable resonance of this repression with the racial intolerance of apartheid society. The former kind of discrimination was not so unusual, and apartheid South Africa was hardly unique in this regard. Hubert du Plessis described the attitude to homosexuals in England during his studies by saying 'it was as if McCarthyism had blown over to England'.<sup>14</sup> He also remembers vividly 1954 as the year in which John Gielgud was arrested because of homosexual activities.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, apartheid South Africa was a society in the grip of a nationalism that distinguishes it from the political climate of England at that time. Willingness to obey the moralistic strictures of an otherwise free society does not

exactly amount to the same thing as willingness to participate in the building of nationalist myths by what many would consider a fascist government. In fact, Arnold van Wyk found the ideological atmosphere in South Africa stifling, even before the Nationalists came to power in 1948. In a letter to Jan Bouws early in 1947, he expresses a desire to find a job in the Netherlands before giving an almost surreal view of art-life at home:

Cape Town is full of dead people who drink brandy to forget and who look forward eagerly to everything from overseas. And everywhere there is a strong tendency to make art strictly nationalistic and to use it only for political purposes. And we are so aware of the fact that we have achieved but little in art that we want to create a tradition overnight, as well as a proud history. Everyone paints if the brush does not fall out of his hands, and everyone writes if he possesses only a thorough knowledge of grammar and in an overview of composers Hubert du Plessis is compared to M.L. de Villiers.<sup>16</sup>



The Del Monico in Cape Town (c. 1948), regular gathering place for, amongst others, Hubert du Plessis and Arnold van Wyk.<sup>17</sup> From left to right: Alan Graham, Arnold van Wyk, Suzanne Swart, Philip Grobler, Jeanette Hanekom (Grobler), Hubert du Plessis. (image supplied by Special Collections Section of the J.S. Gericke Library, University of Stellenbosch)

It is can be assumed from the above that the nationalist tenor of the times was bothersome to Van Wyk, without equating an enlightened disapproval of the small-mindedness of the nationalist project with opposition to the racial attitudes and politics of white South Africa. Documents like letters and diaries, many of which have become available and are being studied for the first time as a result of my research on Van Wyk, might shed greater light on his political views. The jury is still out on this matter. For now, it does not seem unreasonable to recognize that for both Van Wyk and Du Plessis – as for many white composers of art music



– there were many clear advantages to South Africa having a white, Afrikaner-dominated state dedicated to the patronage of European art forms.

But there is a curious discordance in Van Wyk's complaint to Bouws when he writes critically of the focus of the (white) people around him on a place other than the one they live in, South Africa. What is interesting here is the fissure that opens up between the intellectual parochialism of Afrikaner nationalism and the idealization of South Africa as a place of meaning and growth and creative promise; a home in contrast to the sterile nostalgia of the settler perpetually fixing his gaze on the European metropolis as 'home', but also different from the philistine demands of the homogenous nationalist narrative. Having noted this, I should like to leave this space untouched, for now.

It is now difficult to conceptualize Afrikaner identity during Nationalist rule without the taint of apartheid. There is no question that it was emotionally important to Van Wyk to be Afrikaans, as is evidenced by the second sentence of his last will and testament: 'I wish at the outset to record my regret that this Will is not drawn up in Afrikaans, my dearly loved mother-tongue. English has been chosen for practical reasons.'<sup>18</sup> Yet there are indications emerging from documentation that he regarded Afrikaner Nationalism with intellectual disdain. The letter to Bouws is such an indication, as is one a few years later to Anton Hartman, referring significantly again to the use of English instead of Afrikaans at an official function:

I was awarded the D.E. Prize on Friday night in the Electricity Building. I believe the six or so Afrikaners present among the sixty odd people were very upset when I held my little speech in English. According to witnesses, our dear oom Charles [Weich] did not applaud, and Dirk Opperman [the writer] later told me with great sorrow in his voice that he wished I had spoken in Afrikaans. It is about time that we lose our inferiority complex.<sup>19</sup>

By virtue of being of some importance to the Afrikaner power complex, it is perhaps not surprising that in the new dispensation Van Wyk's music could be regarded as an instance of what has contemptuously been called 'Christian National Realism',<sup>20</sup> or that in the politicized narrative of the anti-apartheid struggle, the after-effects of which are still being felt in musical discourse to this day, it has been termed the 'poor' contributions of white music in opposition to more interesting and powerful black musical expressions.<sup>21</sup> One clear historical benefit, then, of forsaking the so-called 'discretion model' for an explicit gay focus would be the possibility of moving beyond these simplistic and unsatisfactory understandings of both South African art and political history. In this manoeuvre, no less than in its homophobic predecessors, it should be admitted that this historical 'benefit' is again proof that 'male heterosexual identity and modern masculinist culture may require for their maintenance the scapegoating crystallization of a same-sex male desire that is widespread and in the first place internal.'<sup>22</sup>

Adjusting the focus in the case of Van Wyk would place risky emphasis on Hennie Aucamp's suspicion of 'a certain pattern with Nols', namely that 'many gays, but also many Romantics, extract for themselves more "voltage" from an unanswered, hopeless love than from a real love!' and his subsequent speculation wondering if 'Nols's eroticism did not become increasingly scaled down, later resulting in his small production.'<sup>23</sup> This becomes the kind of



minoritizing and essentializing gesture that Leo Treitler has warned against so persuasively,<sup>24</sup> but that seems to be an inevitable risk in all anti-homophobic criticism.

Hubert du Plessis has told me that Van Wyk hated the word 'queer' and that 'The tragedy with Nols's love life was that it was almost always a matter of unanswered love. He did not have long and successful relationships.'<sup>25</sup> Another musical application of this insight is provided by Klatzow, who has commented that:

I think [Arnold's homosexuality] crops up in some of the poetry that he chose to set to music. Throughout his work, maybe with a few exceptions with some of his very early pieces, there is this kind of elegiac quality, and I have a feeling that that had to do with the fact that he felt himself erotically dead in some respects. You know, it does in the end come back to the fact of what are you really lamenting. It's a loss within yourself, you know, the Elegy really is that, is it not? It is: you're missing somebody else. And he seemed to say that quite often in his music.<sup>26</sup>

I would further suggest investigating the homo/heterosexual tension in an intensely homophobic society in terms of Van Wyk's tonal Romanticism and his almost coy interweaving and circling in, through and around tonality; his self-confessed 'inability' to write 'fast' or 'joyous' music, his almost destructive self-criticism resulting in an oeuvre of 'incomplete' pieces, his difficulty in sustaining expansive melody. This would be the start of productively ignoring the injunction of most scholarship 'not to ask,' of re-imagining works of a composer that are already canonical without treating that canon as a repository of 'reassuring "traditional" truths that could be made matter for any settled consolidation or congratulation.'<sup>27</sup>

Hubert du Plessis's involvement with large commissions is entirely a different matter from that of Arnold van Wyk, who had a resistance to turning out the 'correct' music for a political occasion. In the postscript to his *Dagboek van die Dans van die Reën* ('Diary of the Dance of the Rain'), Du Plessis writes:

From 1958 to 1961 I composed four works with a specifically South African flavour: *Trio vir klavier, viool en violonsel* (op. 20), *Slamse Beelde*, for choir and small orchestra (op. 21), *Die Dans van die Reën*, for choir and large orchestra (op. 22), and *Vier Slampamperliedjies*, for soprano and piano (op. 23). This sequence of 'national' compositions in the midst of 'international' compositions cannot only be ascribed to coincidental commissions and requests, but also to a growing consciousness of my deeply rooted inseparability from the land of my birth and Afrikaner heritage.<sup>28</sup>

It is interesting that Du Plessis mentions here neither his 1960 orchestration of *Die Stem*,<sup>29</sup> nor his most nationalistic work, *Suid-Afrika - Nag en Daeraad*, of 1965-66. The controversial *Hugenote Kantate* was yet to be composed, in 1986-87. But the neatness of the narrative, the consecutive opus numbers that are conceptually related, are typical of the man and should perhaps be understood as symptomatic of his compulsive narrative control with regard to his 'place in history' and his obsession with closed narratives. I have long felt that works like the Trio, with its incongruous second movement that consists of a combination of the themes of *Jan Pierewiet* and *Ek soek na my Dina*,<sup>30</sup> and *Suid-Afrika - Nag en Daeraad* (a work Du Plessis is very fond of, judging by his requests for performances thereof at his sixtieth and eightieth birthday celebrations), are expressions of the desire of belonging, the weak and perpetual

outsider's ingratiating gesture to the powerful schoolyard bully in the vain hope that it might buy acceptance. This puts a psychological spin on things that implies a degree of conscious or unconscious compensation. Asked about this, Peter Klatzow suggests that:

He [Hubert du Plessis] wanted acknowledgement firstly as an artistic human being. They both [Van Wyk and Du Plessis] did. They both resented in a sense being patronised ... Hubert's feeling was that he was under-acknowledged as a composer. Something which I think he now still deeply believes and resents, especially since events have changed so dramatically, you know, since his time was. But certainly there was a time when he was regarded as on a par with Arnold and certainly the person who would turn out the correct music for a political occasion ... he was the Afrikaans establishment composer who *would* write cantatas for that kind of occasion, which could be regarded as icons as what the Afrikaner could do artistically.<sup>31</sup>

In his remarkable *Dagboek van die Dans van die Reën*, in which he charts the technical progress of his setting of the famous Marais poem, Du Plessis creates a symbolic and metaphorical field of great complexity as context for this, one of his self-proclaimed 'national' compositions.<sup>32</sup> The *Dagboek* is itself a fascinating document, alternating between technical description, personal confession and explication of artistic beliefs suggesting an early idea of publication.<sup>33</sup> A great many musical texts are placed in circulation in the *Dagboek*: Liszt's *Dante Symphony* and *Paganini Etudes I and II*, Stravinsky's *Pétrouchka* and *Le sacre du printemps*, Debussy's *Le martyre* and *La mer*, Satie's *Socrate* and his own *Five Invocations*. Beethoven and Berlioz are mentioned as examples of how to deal with stormy weather-effects, Carl Orff with regard to repetition. Du Plessis's initial analysis of the poem, of which a facsimile appears in the *Dagboek*,<sup>34</sup> indicates that he thought in terms of 'objective' and 'subjective' meanings contained in what he considered the key words of the title and the poem at large: 'Dance' and 'Rain'. The personification of the rain as a woman constituted for him the 'subjective' dimensions of the rain, as did the rite of the dance. But the 'rain' in the title also refers to a natural event, an objective realism. He writes in the *Dagboek* that:

The two key words for the composition occur in the title: *Dance* and *Rain*. Realism and symbolism have to interweave in a subtle way. 'The Dance' is a complicated concept: it refers to both the rain and the subjective, ritual experience thereof.<sup>35</sup>

It is the performativity of 'The Dance' that makes it the complicated concept Du Plessis describes it as being. It is an open-ended event with ambiguous meaning, meaning oscillating between what is understood as being intended (the physical rain) and the ritual that is the experience of the objective fact. Du Plessis's understanding of the poem as realist description features throughout his score. Nowhere is it clearer than in the onomatopoeic devices employed to represent the 'minor characters' of the poem, the 'grootwild' and 'kleinvolk'. Major and minor seconds are used to imitate the chirping of insects and *con sordino* effects on the violas and violins become insect noises.<sup>36</sup> The rain is of course also realistically imitated, but for the composer the event is heavily invested with symbolism, as Du Plessis calls it a 'primeval moment' in his notes.<sup>37</sup> Another seamless transition from mimesis to symbolism happens when a repeated seventh (described by the composer as 'a lion or such like') becomes aware of the 'Great Event: life-giving rain.'<sup>38</sup> These examples indicate not so much a slippage as an almost imperceptible flow to and fro between the composer's understanding of what he

is doing as imitation on the one hand, or metaphysical interpretation on the other. There is no doubt that for Du Plessis, the space of the poem is simultaneously a realistic and symbolic space, corresponding to what he designates right at the start as its 'objective' and 'subjective' meanings.

Interpretive strategies regarding this composition are not simplified by the very intriguing history of the poem and that of its creator. Eugène Marais was perhaps Afrikaans literature's first decadent. 'The alliance between Romanticism, Decadence and homosexuality is very strong,' writes Hennie Aucamp, adding that it is sometimes, as in the case of I.D. du Plessis, accompanied by a 'gravitation towards "the Other" [in the Afrikaans: *die hang na die ander, soos Opperman dit stel*]: the occult, the grizzly, the Decadent'.<sup>39</sup> The suggestion here is not that Eugène Marais was gay, which he was not, but that some of his poetry is invested with an aura of decadence probably highly attractive to a gay sensibility, informing what Du Plessis might have experienced as the 'subjective,' performative aspect of the poem. It is indeed interesting that so many South African gay composers have tried to set this poem to music. Apart from Du Plessis, there are settings by Peter Klatzow, Hendrik Hofmeyr, Priaulx Rainier and sketches also indicating Arnold van Wyk's interest in the poem. Neither Klatzow nor Hofmeyr gave a hint of this connection when asked about why they were interested in setting the poem to music, nor does Du Plessis mention this possible connection directly. Rainier's interest was apparently kindled by her knowledge of the poem in Uys Krige's translation of it.<sup>40</sup>

*Die Dans van die Reën* appears in slightly different form as a poem within a series of short stories, called *Dwaalstories*, first published in 1921 in *Die Boerevrou*.<sup>41</sup> N.P. van Wyk Louw described these four short stories as 'Some of the greatest prose in our language'. In fact, the literary critic Ernst Lindenberg has been quoted as saying that he could not believe that Marais could have written the stories, as they are so vastly superior to the rest of his prose. Authorship of the stories is an interesting matter, as they are presumably the result of records made by Marais of conversations between himself and a San man, 'Ou Hendrik'. It is not known when Marais first met Ou Hendrik – he was living in a room on the farm Rietfontein in the Waterberg at the time – but his biographer, Leon Rousseau, thinks it probable that the stories were 'recorded' in writing in 1913. It is surmised that the artist Erich Mayer, who visited Marais at this time and also made a pen sketch of Ou Hendrik, was instrumental in this regard. Rousseau speculates that the authorship of these remarkable stories could even be coloured by the probability that the old San man was, like many of the best story tellers of the region, a *dagga* (cannabis) smoker. Thus, from the ancient mythology of the San, mediated by the *dagga* pipe of Ou Hendrik and the morphine needle of Eugène Marais, came the *Dwaalstories* as a unique achievement in Afrikaans. The story of its authorship is one almost like that of the gospels: the earthly scribe becoming only the medium through which the divine message is recorded. In this case the message is the essence of Africa, contained in the repositories of Ou Hendrik's memory, the scribe the ambiguous figure of Marais, and the medium the young language Afrikaans. What would in retrospect be one of the first flowerings of Afrikaans as the vehicle of Afrikaner nationalism in the hands of the mythologized Marais, was then the opiate/dagga-filtered tales of an old Bushman, recorded by an ambiguous loner writing about white ants, evolution and the joys of morphine addiction.<sup>42</sup> *Die Dans van die*

*Reën* is therefore always already an ambiguous place-holder for varied, contesting meanings of hallucinatory coloured memory and retrospective canonized national narratives.

Marais was not sentimental about nature. He regarded the whole of nature as feminine (a result of his traditional literary background), but his view of nature as woman was one of cruelty and mercilessness, which was also his view of women in general, as filtered by a knightly, enduring, even masochistic attitude.<sup>43</sup> These perspectives are perhaps better illustrated by the idea of drought, the dominating presence of the poem, than by rain. In the Waterberg Marais got to know drought in the years after the Anglo-Boer War, writing:

Who, who has had the experience of one or another small 'Thirst' in the north of our country, can ever forget the event? The continuous groans of the oxen – the most gut-wrenching sound that a speechless animal can make; the glowing heat of the sun; the unending sand with a suffocating dust cloud that hangs over everything, as if in it the Thirst becomes an apparition always providing the proof that the most strenuous human striving will remain fruitless; the longing gaze for signs of water – and hope continually dashed!<sup>44</sup>

This drought is the magnetic field in *Die Dans van die Reën*. The intimate knowledge thereof is what stretches expectation to breaking point, that informs the ecstasy of the dance and the calls for 'Our Sister'. It is the tension of dynamic waiting as erotic expectation, as opposed to passive waiting. And it is here manufactured by invoking the topos of 'drought' in Afrikaner mythology and consciousness, and telescoping that knowledge into the seconds before it is broken, resulting in the uncontainable excess of emotion informing the four planned climaxes of the composition. That Du Plessis saw drought as the paradigm for his setting, is clear when he writes in his initial analysis of the poem, 'Introduction – drought, yearning [smagting]' before the first line.<sup>45</sup> 'Heat waves' are produced by the celli, *sul ponticello*, and the yearning is given voice in the calls of the contrabassoon and double bass in bars 1-10. Early on in his work on the poem, he activates another intertext in the *Dagboek*, by writing: 'If I start the work with the imitation of Drought – The Waste Land – then I must use stormy effects.'<sup>46</sup> Whether Du Plessis was aware that *The Waste Land*, written six years into T.S. Eliot's marriage to Vivienne Eliot, signalled his tortured experience of the inadequacies of human love, is of course not known.

*'What are you thinking of? What thinking?*

*What?'*<sup>47</sup>

Whether the Drought, so intimately wired into Afrikaner pastoral consciousness in the manner described by Marais, is for him also a cage from which the stormy effects signal the start of release, can only be guessed at.

*'What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?'*<sup>48</sup>

And when the Rain, who is for Du Plessis a 'gentle' entity, emerges spectacularly in her larger than life attire with bracelets jingling, copper rings shining, necklaces catching the last rays of the sun, from behind the mountains to open her karos and steps down from the heights to quench the thirst, to break the drought in the main climax of the composition, is this stepping out not a moment of ecstatic revelation? Does it not resonate significantly with the salient continuity and centrality of the historical narrative of the closet and the ambivalent image of

coming out that regularly interfaces with the image of the closet? And are not the cries, 'You have come! You have come!' cries of fulfilment?

*'Do you know nothing? Do you see nothing?'*

Du Plessis writes in the foreword of *Dagboek van die Dans van die Reën* that:

... I never had any knowledge of the essence of Bushman music. The intended 'primitivism' of my setting is taken from the European music tradition – with roots stretching back to the Middle Ages – of which I, as an academically trained musician, am an inheritor. My setting is therefore that of a South African 'Westerner' who can, through his medium, not come nearly as close to the Bushman's animal-human experience of the life-giving rain as could Eugène Marais through the medium of imitative poetry.

If my music there differs irreconcilably from that which Jan Konterdans (alias Krom Joggen) would have made – much too Western-civilized for the purist – I console myself with the fact that it was conceptualized for a whole different ensemble, for ears trained to hear European music, and will never be able to be performed by a Bushman group.<sup>49</sup>

This is a remarkable passage, as it reveals an aspect of the ambiguous alliance between Afrikaner nationalism and gay composers. Whereas the transgressive move between cultures and races was deemed impossible, and acknowledged by the composer as such, in Du Plessis's *Die Dans van die Reën*, as in less nationalistic works like the song cycles *Die Vrou* [The Woman] or *Vreemde Liefde* [Strange Love], the transgressive move between the overlapping concepts of gender and sexuality is attempted and accomplished, sometimes overtly as part of the nationalist narrative. This musical 'cross-dressing' has a space of operation within the imposed strictures of political possibility, as space that is both national and gay without the one level of meaning eliding or neutralizing the other. If, as Sedgwick says, 'Canonicity ... seems the necessary wadding of pious obliviousness that allows for the transmission from one generation to another of texts that have the potential to dismantle the impacted foundations upon which a given culture rests';<sup>50</sup> it may be argued that it is the very strictures of national art that provide the secure closet enabling the encoding of this kind of difference in hegemonic Western high art in South Africa. Or that the gender trope of inversion, 'a women's soul trapped in a man's body', finds applicability here in the habitation of the nationalist narrative by a current of same-sex desire. There is fragility in this situation and toleration of difference with the understanding that 'there was a respectable place for marginality, bohemia. But it had to justify its unorthodox practices by its intellectual and artistic achievement', ultimately bolstering heterosexist cultural projects.<sup>51</sup> I am suggesting that Hubert du Plessis could 'up the stakes', as it were, in exploring and representing the tension of homo/heterosexual definition in works like *Die Dans van die Reën* precisely *because* he had the protection of a nationalistic alibi. That the space identified earlier with regard to Arnold van Wyk – related to, but at the margins of, Afrikaner nationalism – is here seen for what it is: 'the prestige, magnetism, vulnerability, self-alienation, co-optibility, and perhaps ultimately the potential for a certain defiance that inhere in the canonical culture of the closet.'<sup>52</sup> Hubert du Plessis's *Die Dans van die Reën*, with its myriad of contexts and intertexts and ambiguities covered in the flag of the

Republic, is an exemplary text of two co-existing narratives that do not cancel each other out, but where the national narrative *is* a gay narrative.

I experience acute discomfort when listening to my recorded interview with Howard Ferguson. I can see myself in the sitting room; speaking, asking questions, conversing with the elderly gentleman in my uncomfortable English and even more uncomfortable mores. Why am I shy to ask Howard Ferguson about Arnold van Wyk's sexuality? What is the barrier to my desire to know? A bourgeois sense of decency? The assumption that I am asking him to reveal a dirty secret? For me, the answer is about more than what Freud has referred to as the 'forgotten material' indexed by our reticence when we excise what we deem disagreeable, nonsensical, unimportant or irrelevant. And the highly visible repression of Afrikaner Calvinism and the designation of sexuality as sin is nothing if not the same Freudian condition exteriorized fanatically in a difference of degree rather than principle.

I recall a scene of many years ago. My best friend reveals to me that he is gay. 'You are like a brother to me,' I fluster. 'Stop being hysterical,' he responds. The resulting break is total. In my moment of panic and confusion I instinctively reached for the ambiguity of the brothers-in-arms motive: Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Achilles and Patrocles, Damon and Pythias, David and Jonathan. I was embarrassed to ask Howard Ferguson the question that was overwhelmingly and silently present in his lounge on 8 January 1998 in Cambridge because I felt implicated by my desire to know. Desire to know is just another modality of desire. The question fascinated by (desirous of) the homosexual Other as an identity is the question aimed at confirming a heterosexual identity, a secure version of masculinity. Whether spoken or unspoken, when recognized, it points to a queer, asymmetrical, unstable alliance built into the problem of homo/heterosexual identity, and the negotiations between many different presents, and many different pasts.

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Kariena Hahn, 19 November 2001, translated from the Afrikaans by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Professor Guido Perold and his wife, Charlotte Perold, 11 December 2001, translated from the Afrikaans by the author.

<sup>3</sup> See Terry Eagleton: 'Reach-me-down Romantic', in: *London Review of Books*, Vol. 25, No. 12, 19 June 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Philip Brett: 'Britten's Dream', in: *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993, pp. 259-80, esp. p.260.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Aldrich: *Colonialism and Homosexuality*. London: Routledge, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to the author from Hennie Aucamp, 8 December 2002, translated from the Afrikaans.

<sup>7</sup> A fallacy he also points out with regard to D.J. Opperman's criticism of I.D. du Plessis's poetry. See Hennie Aucamp: "'n Bepaalde soort verbeelding?', in: *Lewe met woorde*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1990, pp. 1-31, esp. p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Ned Rorem: *Lies: A Diary 1986-1999*. Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2000, p. 320. I should like to thank Hennie Aucamp for alerting me to this passage.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Alan Sinfield: *Cultural Politics – Queer Reading*. London: Routledge, 1994, p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> This usage is to be differentiated from Sedgwick's 'universalizing' and 'minoritizing' thinking about gay sexuality. The universality aspired to here is not one of a common homosexual component in all people, but one of a common aesthetic. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: *Epistemology of the Closet*. Hemel Hemstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, pp. 84-90.



- <sup>11</sup> Alan Sinfield: *Cultural Politics – Queer Reading*, p. 63.
- <sup>12</sup> Interview with the author, 14 July 2003.
- <sup>13</sup> Aucamp: 'Inleiding', in: *Wisselstroom*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, p. 16.
- <sup>14</sup> Heinrich van der Mescht: 'Hubert du Plessis se vreemde liefde/*Vreemde Liefde*', in: *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 2002, p. 163.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> Letter from Arnold van Wyk to Jan Bouws, 27 February 1947, translated from the Afrikaans by the author; Nasionale Afrikaanse Letterkundige Museum en Navorsingsentrum (NALN), Bloemfontein, MM20/79/11.-45.
- <sup>17</sup> In his now largely forgotten novel, *Die singende reën* ('The Singing Rain'), Van Wyk's friend the painter Johannes Meintjes provides a description of the Del Monico during the years of the Second World War, some three years before the photograph was taken: 'Del Monico in those years consisted of two separate little worlds: a pleasant restaurant on the first floor, and underneath a vulgar, decorated hall with overpopulated groups at the many cane tables. A mixture from all social circles gathered there, but it was mainly the drinking place for sailors and soldiers from all visiting convoys. Cape Town offered little amusement during the war years, especially places where music, drink and women were available, and the result was that the gigantic hall with its "Spanish" decoration swarmed with uniforms from all the corners of the allied world. The result of the Bohemian partying was that the place became obscene and often dangerous; fights would break out, prostitutes would attack each other, members of the mercantile fleet and the navy would often come to blows and riots among the rest occurred regularly. Sown in this many-coloured mass one often found prominent people who came there for their own reasons, but it was mainly the place of amusement for the troops, and in a foreign harbour they could not really care how they behaved themselves.' *Die singende reën*. Molteno: Bamboesberg-uitgewers, 1962, pp. 55-6. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present writer.
- <sup>18</sup> Last Will and Testament of Arnold van Wyk, Special Collections Section of the J.S. Gericke Library, University of Stellenbosch.
- <sup>19</sup> Letter from Arnold van Wyk to Anton Hartman, 26 July 1954, State Archives, Pretoria. Translated from the Afrikaans by the present writer.
- <sup>20</sup> David Hoenigsberg: 'Chamber Symphony 1998', in: *Current Musicology*, Vols. 67 & 68, 2002, pp. 139-56, esp. p. 141.
- <sup>21</sup> Jonas Gwangwa and Fulco van Aurich, 'The Melody of Freedom: a Reflection on Music', in: *Culture in Another South Africa*, eds. Willem Campschreur and Joost Divendal. London: Zed Books, n.d., pp. 146-59, esp. p. 153.
- <sup>22</sup> Sedgwick: *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 85.
- <sup>23</sup> Letter from Hennie Aucamp to the author, 8 December 2002.
- <sup>24</sup> Leo Treitler: 'Gender and Other Dualities of Music History', in: *Musicology and Difference*, pp. 23-45.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview with the author, 27 May 2001, translated from the Afrikaans by the present writer.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview with the author, 14 July 2003.
- <sup>27</sup> Sedgwick: *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 54
- <sup>28</sup> Hubert du Plessis: *Dagboek van die Dans van die Reën*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1970, p. 43. All citations from this source have been translated from the Afrikaans by the present writer, unless stated otherwise.
- <sup>29</sup> See SABC transcription record LP 1735.
- <sup>30</sup> Du Plessis is quoted as saying about these themes: 'I wanted them to evoke melancholy and tender memories of the past, to express deep love and sympathy towards my country, to contrast simplicity with complexity'; Edward Aitchison: 'Hubert du Plessis', in: *Composers in South Africa Today*, ed. Peter Klatzow. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 33-75, esp. p. 70.
- <sup>31</sup> Interview with the author, 14 July 2003.
- <sup>32</sup> See Hubert du Plessis: *Dagboek van die Dans van die Reën*. The original, handwritten diary is in the possession of the Nasionale Afrikaanse Letterkundige Museum en Navorsingsentrum (NALN) in Bloemfontein.



- <sup>33</sup> Although wanting to chart the compositional process, Du Plessis writes that originally he did not intend the diary for publication. See *Dagboek van die Dans van die Reën*, p. 7.
- <sup>34</sup> Du Plessis: *Dagboek van die Dans van die Reën*, p. 9.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- <sup>39</sup> Letter to the author, 8 December 2002. See also Aucamp's article 'n Bepaalde soort verbeelding?', esp. pp. 7-12.
- <sup>40</sup> June Opie: 'Come and Listen to the Stars Singing,' *Priaultx Rainier: a Pictorial Biography*. Penzance: Alison Hodge, 1988, p. 38.
- <sup>41</sup> All the information from this paragraph is taken from Leon Rousseau's *Die Groot Verlange: die verhaal van Eugène Marais*. Cape Town and Pretoria: Human & Rousseau, 1974, pp. 254-5.
- <sup>42</sup> At the time of his setting of the poem, Du Plessis was unaware of its original narrative context. Du Plessis mentions this as he explains that his setting did not take the prose context of the poem into consideration. *Dagboek van die Dans van die Reën*, pp. 7-8.
- <sup>43</sup> Rousseau: *Die Groot Verlange*, p. 262.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263. Translation from the Afrikaans by the present writer.
- <sup>45</sup> Du Plessis: *Dagboek van die Dans van die Reën*, p. 9.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- <sup>47</sup> T.S. Eliot: 'A Game of Chess,' *The Waste Land*, in: *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London: Faber, 1974 p. 67.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- <sup>49</sup> Du Plessis: *Dagboek van die Dans van die Reën*, p. 8.
- <sup>50</sup> Sedgwick: *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 54.
- <sup>51</sup> Harold Bloom cited in Sedgwick: *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 56.
- <sup>52</sup> Sedgwick: *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 57.

# THE POLITICS OF THE INEFFABLE: A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING OF HUBERT DU PLESSIS'S 'DE BRUID'

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Martina Viljoen & Nicol Viljoen

As a personal and political odyssey documenting the concerns and controversies of gender-variant people in society, gender theory has progressively moved beyond its initial (feminist) focus on the asymmetrical organisation of social relations pertaining to culturally entrenched stereotypes of 'the masculine' and 'the feminine'. In its most recent postmodernist guises, gender theory explores, amongst other issues, the complexities of gay, lesbian and transgender culture. In its various phases and in its heterogeneous repertoire of theoretical manoeuvres, however, it concerns the analysis and critique of an unequal distribution of social power relating to gender identity.

In this chapter, a deconstructive reading undermines accepted notions of unity, identity and ownership in Hubert du Plessis's song 'De Bruid' [The Bride]. Uncovering the 'play of differences' both present and absent in Du Plessis's powerful setting, the analysis simultaneously probes core philosophical foundations of postmodernist musicology. In this respect, the reading turns critically on itself in examining the deconstructive agenda predominant in feminist scholarship. This theoretical subtext operates on the periphery of the analysis as a secondary sceptical narrative. Central to the reading, however, are both the freedom of Derrida's deconstructive method, and the play of substitutions evocatively suggested by Du Plessis's rich musical text.

## Deconstruction as an ethico-political impulse

In his analysis of the relationship of deconstruction to 'real' political codes and programmes, Thomas McCarthy observes that Derrida has exhibited differing shades of attitude towards the politics of deconstruction.<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of the 1960s his tone was at times apocalyptic, if not revolutionary. In 'The Ends of Man', a paper first read in 1968, he spoke of the *ébranlement* ('total trembling') of the Man-Being constituent that inhabits and is inhabited by the language of the West. This 'radical trembling', Derrida posited, is played out 'in the violent relationships of the whole of the West to its other, whether a "linguistic relationship" ... or ethnological, economic, political, military relationships, etc.'<sup>2</sup>

Yet, during this period and subsequently, Derrida's tone was often one of patient resistance to the ultimately 'unslayable' hydra of Western logocentrism. Thus, in a well-known interview with Julia Kristeva, Derrida professed his disbelief in 'decisive ruptures', maintaining in an almost poetical vein that 'Breaks are always, and fatally, reinscribed in an old cloth that must continually, interminably be undone.'<sup>3</sup> This means that deconstruction cannot rid itself of, once and for all, those concepts fundamental to Western rationalism, but manages only, repeatedly, 'to displace them, to turn them against their presuppositions, to reinscribe them

in other chains, and little by little to modify the terrain of our work and thereby to produce new configurations'.<sup>4</sup> By these means deconstruction organizes 'a structure of resistance to the dominant conceptuality'.<sup>5</sup> During the 1980s Derrida's view became explicitly anti-apocalyptic. Deconstruction then was not prophetic or visionary; it did not announce an imminent end or a new dawning. Indeed, Derrida even characterized it at times as a new *Aufklärung*.<sup>6</sup> Christopher Norris points out that one could assemble quite a dossier of statements – beginning with some well-known passages from *Of Grammatology* – where Derrida firmly rejected the idea that deconstruction dispensed with interpretative validity, 'right' reading, consistency, logic, or truth.<sup>7</sup> In that sense, deconstruction was not a matter of renouncing 'the principle of reason', but of interrogating 'its meaning, its origin, its goal, its limits', that is, of inquiring after 'the grounding of the ground itself'.<sup>8</sup> Throughout these changes in nuance, however, Derrida's account of deconstruction has remained constant in central respects. Principally, deconstruction involves a radical decentring of the subject in relation to language: 'The subject, and first of all the conscious and speaking subject, depends upon the system of differences and the moment of *différance*'.<sup>9</sup>

This process of signification is a 'play of differences' in such a way that no element can function as a sign without referring to other elements that are not themselves present; and every element is constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain.<sup>10</sup> Because the tissue of relations and differences inevitably leaves its trace in any signifier, a simple unambiguous meaning can never be achieved. Beyond any present meaning lies the absent, unspoken, unthought network of conditions, presuppositions and mediations on which it depends. As a result, meaning always escapes any unitary conscious grasp we may have of it, for language, as 'writing', inevitably harbours the possibility of an endless dissemination of sense, and an indefinite multiplicity of recontextualizations and reinterpretations. The task of deconstruction is thus ceaselessly to undermine the illusion of a 'pure' reason that can gain control over its own conditions, and the dream of a definitive grasp of basic meanings and truths. In Derrida's words: 'It inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the deconstruction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos. Particularly the signification of truth'.<sup>11</sup>

Derrida has repeatedly insisted on the political character of deconstructionist practice: 'It is not neutral' ... 'it intervenes'.<sup>12</sup> Yet he has been rather evasive about just which politics, or approach to politics, it involves. Derrida's politically 'coded' principled stands – on neo-colonialism, women's liberation and apartheid, for instance – have shown him to be generally on the 'progressive' side, but they have not been backed by much historical or institutional analysis (cf. Foucault) and not much more explicit normative critique (cf. Habermas). While his readers disagree considerably about which political standpoint his writings reflect, they cannot turn to Derrida's political 'theory' for a solution, because he does not offer one, and, indeed, regards the whole genre as being eminently deconstructible.<sup>13</sup> Despite these ethico-political 'barriers', Derrida's deconstructionism is generally taken to be a sceptical enterprise.<sup>14</sup> This perception is no doubt nurtured by his figurative characterizations of it, namely to 'desediment', 'destabilise', 'uproot' and 'overturn' inherited concepts and schemes, and to 'turn them against their own presuppositions', 'to loosen', 'undo', 'decompose' and 'dismantle' them.

Drawing on the model provided by Derrida in his well-known reading of Van Gogh's painting entitled 'Old Shoes with Laces',<sup>15</sup> this chapter focuses on Derrida's attempt to demystify the aesthetic as a realm of purely disinterested values. The subject of the analysis is Hubert du Plessis's song 'De Bruid', a complex text in which interests of a socio-political nature may be speculatively unmasked. In pursuing questions of ownership, a deconstructive reading reveals heterogeneous determinations of the text which constitute locally and textually the possibility of 'presence' while, in true Derridian fashion, simultaneously suggesting the impossibility of their knowability.

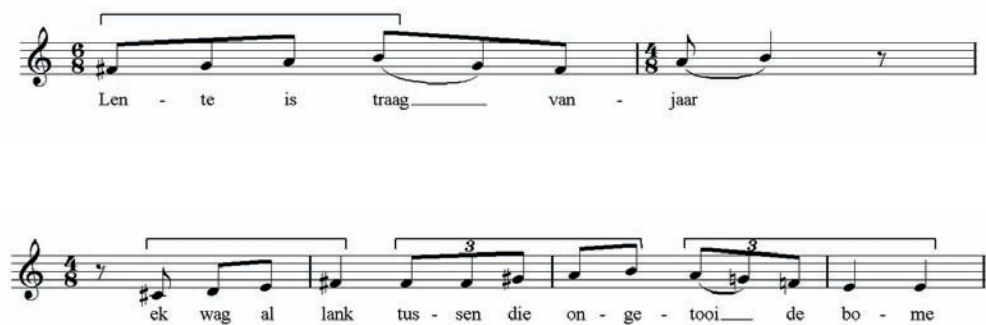
### **The Deconstructive Sublime: Hubert du Plessis's 'De Bruid'**

Various analyses of Derrida's deconstructive practice conclude that its main ethico-political impulse is a commitment to bear witness to what one may designate as the Other of Western rationalism, i.e. that which has been subordinated in hierarchical systematization, or excluded in the drawing of boundaries, or marginalized in identifying what is central, or homogenized or colonized in the name of the universal.<sup>16</sup> According to this reading, deconstruction constantly reminds us that rationalism's constitutive assumption of the fundamental intelligibility of experience and reality has underwritten a history of repression in theory and practice – the repression of other people in nature, in ourselves, in other persons and other peoples.<sup>17</sup>

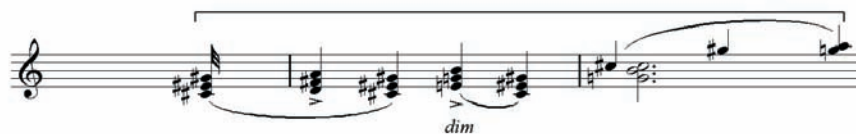
Our reading of Du Plessis's 'De Bruid' will focus primarily on deconstruction's ability to give 'voice' to the excluded other(s) in this song, and its ability to probe the limits of certain idealizations and normative presuppositions operative beneath the ambivalently crafted surface of the text.

'De Bruid' is the central part of Du Plessis's song cycle *Die Vrou* [The Woman], commissioned for the Centenary Festival of the University of Stellenbosch in 1966. The composer has explained that the Dutch poet Hendrik Marsman's 'De Bruid' had been the work's main creative impetus, inspiring also the choice of texts for the remaining four songs.<sup>18</sup> Together, the five songs narratively represent different symbolic stages in a woman's life: 'Die Meisie' (Elizabeth Eybers), 'Chant d'amour' (*Cantique des Cantiques*, Solomon), 'De Bruid' (Hendrik Marsman), 'Wiegenlied' (Christian Morgenstern) and 'Die Moeder' (Elizabeth Eybers). Simultaneously, the use of texts from different languages accentuates the universality of the theme. Note that Du Plessis's choice of texts constructs feminine erotic experience only in relation to family life – a culturally entrenched idealization of womanhood which, in consequence of patriarchal ideology, is hardly applicable to the male identity.

Similar to nineteenth-century song cycles, such as those of Robert Schumann, musical unity is established in Du Plessis's *Die Vrou* via motives rich in symbolic content. Four such motives, depicted as such by the composer, are present throughout the song cycle. The tetrachord motive (Example 1), a succession of four predominantly ascending conjunct notes, serves to represent universality, while the falling fifths motive symbolizes biological fulfilment (Example 2).

**EXAMPLE 1 Tetrachord Motive (Universality)****EXAMPLE 2 Falling Fifths Motive (Biological Fulfilment)**

The leap motive represents triumphant ecstasy (Example 3), and the triad motive sorrow (Example 4). Ironically, Du Plessis has stressed the point that this song-cycle is a joyful work, and that sorrow is never directly expressed.<sup>19</sup>

**EXAMPLE 3 Leap Motive (Triumphant Ecstasy)****EXAMPLE 4 The Triad Motive (Sorrow)**

Following Derrida's reading of Van Gogh's 'Old shoes with laces', a pivotal question in establishing any socio-political 'commitments' operative in this text can be identified as one of constructing ownership. While in Van Gogh's painting it is the ownership of the shoes which is at stake, in Du Plessis's 'De Bruid' it is the ownership of the body. Does this text reflect the common discourse of patriarchal repression? Or does it associate itself with the resisting discourse of the 'victims' of exploitative patriarchal social structures?

In representing the most explicitly corporeal and sensuous imaging in the cycle as a whole, 'De Bruid', with its intense play of word and tone, draws vividly on the somatic sexual metaphor of the river. With its strong anti-intellectualist and anti-rationalist undercurrents, Marsman's early twentieth-century vitalist poetry and Du Plessis's neo-Romantic expressionism bring into existence a liberating artistic symbiosis. Feminist criticism has repeatedly emphasized the subversive power of metaphors of fluidity that dismantle both notions of patriarchy and dualist conceptualisations of mind and body, sacred and profane.<sup>20</sup> It is therefore ironic that Marsman's representation of the orgasmic bride is simultaneously a male idealization of woman as mother so that in the moment of ecstasy, fulfilment is found in the vision of childbearing whereby the woman is cosmically sublimated – as is the case in many other Marsman poems.<sup>21</sup> Marsman's metaphor of fluidity thus conceals a universalistic and repressive gender discourse. Note that the reference to 'the mountains of the horizon' at the end of the poem (see Example 5) also (metaphorically) suggests the 'limits' of feminine existence. Similarly, the opening line ('Ik dacht dat ik geboren was voor verdriet') points to the cultural stereotype of the 'woeful' woman:

**EXAMPLE 5 'De Bruid' by Hendrik Marsman<sup>22</sup>**

Ik dacht dat ik geboren was voor verdriet  
en nu ben ik opeens een lied  
aan't worden, fluist'rend door het ijle morgenriet  
nu smelt ik weg en voel mij openstroomen  
naar alle verten van den horizon  
maar ik weet niet  
meer waar mijn loop begon.  
  
de schaduwen van blinkend witte wolken  
bespelen mij en overzeilen mij  
scholen zilvren visschen bevolken  
mijne diepte en bliksemend voel ik ze mij  
doorschichten en mijne water'n alom doorkruisen  
en in mijn lissen vluchten.  
zij zijn mijn kind'ren en mijn liefste droomen  
ik ben nu volgegoten met geluk.  
de tranen die ik schreide en de zuchten  
zie ik vervluchtigen tot regenbogen  
die van mijn oogen springen naar de zon.  
  
waar zijn de bergen van de horizon?  
ik zie ze niet.

Du Plessis's cycle culminates in the final song, 'Die Moeder' [The Mother]. With its darker undercurrents of obsessive motherly love, Elizabeth Eybers's sombre poem is set by Du Plessis in a musical idiom which is at times terrifying. It is significant that at the words 'Selfs as die Dood sy somber baken steek' [Even when Death makes its sombre mark], the composer draws on a quotation from the ending of his Prelude Op. 18, No. 7 of which he has said: '... since I wrote that disturbing piece, I have developed an obsession with E flat minor as my "Key of Death"'.<sup>23</sup>

To whom does the body in 'De Bruid' belong? Does it belong to the idealized but repressed, enclosed and static images of patriarchy? Does it belong to a discourse which subverts those images? Or does a deconstructive reading of this song suggest not only, in Derridian fashion, a 'double' reading, but even perhaps a 'triple marginality' of the text? The work of the feminist critic Mary Douglas suggests that the human body stands as a metaphor for social structures because of its orifices, which are boundaries dividing the self and that which is external to it. By stressing margins, her theory potentially signifies the passage of bodily fluids as a metaphor which challenges societal conventions.<sup>24</sup> Human de Villiers explores somatic metaphors related to explosion, outburst and eruption. By grouping male and female artists together, these authors suggest an underlying non-binary and geneticist match related to the stylized use of images of fluidity in visual works of art. Reading body fluids as metaphors of subversion, they imply that metaphors of fluidity 'dissolve' traditionally accepted social boundaries, thereby 'overflowing' the limitations of fixed ('masculine') beliefs and structures.<sup>25</sup>

Du Plessis's musical metaphors are powerful figurative manifestations of fluidity. In the introduction to 'De Bruid', apart from sonorities rippling outwards (unison, parallel seconds, thirds and tritones), major-minor sonorities with added tritones and semitone melodic fragments with dramatically ascending contours explore extremes of register through contrary movement in the right and left hand parts. Parallel tertian chord oscillations on E flat and D arise on a bass line in octaves with added fifths and fourths. The tonal motion proceeds from E flat through C and E flat to D. The entry of the voice on G sharp constructs a tritone from D. The opening melodic gesture extemporizes the tritone D – G sharp. In the accompaniment, there is a parallel semitone triad movement (C sharp – D) that possibly correlates with the E flat – D progression at the end of the introduction. The setting of 'en nu ben ik opeens een lied aan't worden' to 'fluist'rend door het ijle morgenriet' is in stark contrast with the dramatic sonorities and tension of the introduction. Apart from a lighter texture, linear movement in the accompaniment is based on the triad sonorities and second intervals which appear in the introduction. Major and minor chords are juxtaposed, while the tritone again appears within the tonal areas of D flat/C sharp and C in the accompaniment. A short interlude refers back to the second part of the introduction, the tonal movement being from C to E flat.

The following section (from 'nu smelt ik weg en voel mij openstroomen' to 'maar ik weet niet meer waar mijn loop begon') is based on the second part of the introduction and its further development. Moving through different tonal areas (E flat, B flat, A flat, G flat), there is an arpeggiated movement in the high register at the words 'waar mijn loop begon'. The latter is based on triadic sonorities with added tritones. The semitone parallel triadic motive reappears on F – G flat, followed by an interlude with semitone and arpeggiated movement and extremes of register in both right hand and left hand parts. The setting of the lines from 'de



schaduwen van blinkend witte wolken' to 'en in mijn lissen vluchten' is a further development of the previously described material based on linear movement, fluctuating tonal events and major-minor juxtapositions. On the words 'scholen zilvren visschen,' the second part of the introduction is once again developed through ascending melodic lines including the tritone, and parallel chord movement as well as by arpeggio movement in the tonal areas of E flat and D. This section ends in E major/minor with arpeggiated movement, testing the limits of register and with a re-appearance of the semitone triadic motive on B/C.

'Zij zijn mijn kind'ren en mijn liefste droomen' is set to an ascending and descending melodic motion in the vocal part with a static E flat harmony in the accompaniment. This melodic motion can be interpreted as a variant of the 'universal' motive. An interlude exploits sonorities from the introduction within the tonal areas of E flat, D and D flat. The setting of 'Ik ben nu volgegoten met geluk' is characterized by an ecstatic, slowly moving melodic line over an ascending arpeggiated tonal movement (D flat/F flat/A flat). In reaching the A flat tonality, there is a subtle mixture from minor to major, symbolizing the attainment of happiness. Also within A flat, there is an interlude based on the melodic figure of 'Zij zijn mijn kindren...'. Here, it moves in parallel triads followed by two appearances of the semitone triadic motive, the last of which in augmentation. The setting of the lines from 'De tranen die ik schreide' to 'springen naar de zon' is a further development of previously employed chordal structures and linear movement, particularly arpeggiated forms, moving through the tonalities of G sharp/E flat/D/F sharp and A. An interlude once more evokes the melodic figure to which 'Zij zijn mijn kindren' was set. 'Waar zijn de bergen van de horizon ... ik zie ze niet' is a final retrospection of the second part of the introduction with parallel semitone chordal oscillations in E flat above an E flat/B flat bass moving in octaves. The final two sonorities of the song suggest the endlessness of the horizon in representing open E flat fifths with an added tritone and the resolution of the latter to the final open fifth chord.

The general features of the song are therefore strong dissonances (especially the second and the tritone), chordal structures based on major/minor and tritone combinations, parallel chordal movements, linear textures, and tonal movement in seconds and thirds. Then there are extreme register contrasts, fluctuation between chordal and linear textures, darker and lighter sound nuances, and fragmented and widely spaced melodic contours. It is important to note a decisive chordal, tonal and textural gravity, as well as a contraction and concentration of melodic and harmonic materials, and a continuous reworking of and referral to specific melodic and harmonic materials. There is also a constant exploration of contrasting tonal areas and consonance and dissonance. These dramatic musical qualities are suggestive not only of 'waves' of elemental sexual euphoria, but also of the subversive qualities of change, transition and metamorphosis.

There are two intertextual references in 'De Bruid' which powerfully suggest specific meaning in this text.<sup>26</sup> The first is derived from the aria 'E lucevan le stelle' from Puccini's *Tosca*, an aria Hans-Jürgen Winterhoff has described as a manifestation of the motive of love, melancholy and longing in this opera.<sup>27</sup> The tetrachord figure in the Puccini aria resembles that of Du Plessis's 'universal' motive. The second reference, fast-moving arpeggiation figures that frequently appear in the piano accompaniment of the song, is derived from similar figures in Franz Liszt's 'The Fountains of the Villa d'Este', suggesting the visual splendour of the colossal

fountains. While Marsman's textual metaphor of the river – an image also used in Marsman's poem 'Bloei' – is representative of feminine sexuality, the image of the fountain is an age-old phallic symbol. This subtle reversal of sexual identity in 'De Bruid' – critically reconstructable 'within' the river metaphor, as it were – may point to a celebration of gay love. This veneration of homo-eroticism is restrained, however, by deep melancholy; it is a celebration which, at the end of Du Plessis's cycle, foreshadows death. And yet, the image of the fountain simultaneously points to a certain creative 'eruption' which subverts conceited 'masculine' artistic strivings. The metaphor thus invokes works of Marcel Duchamp and Bruce Nauman that suspend stereotypical (masculine) convictions about art through subversive fountain images.<sup>28</sup>

To whom does 'De Bruid' belong? Following Derrida's analysis of Van Gogh's painting, the 'surplus value' of this song is bound up with the question of its ownership. Does the supplementarity<sup>29</sup> of this musical text suggest to us that 'De Bruid' is a 'self-portrait' of the composer – a self-professed gay artist?

Returning to the ethico-political dimensions of deconstruction, Derrida's reading of Van Gogh's 'Old Shoes with Laces' advocates that such a giving of 'face' and subjectivity to a work of art is not part of the deconstructive agenda. Derrida does not provide the painting with a historical specificity and the context of a particular socio-cultural 'world'. Neither does he saturate the work with concepts which would affirm the ideal of 'truth'. His reading, in fact, radically dispenses with the possibility of both presence and alterity. Thus, for Derrida, the ownership of the shoes in Van Gogh's painting remains indeterminate.

What if any insight is gained by art 'without truth', by art suspending its own meaning? Jay Bernstein notes that Derrida's deferral of truth (ownership) in this painting marks out a space for the other that is not reducible to the logic of the same, arguing that only 'without truth' can the otherness of the other be sustained. Transferred to Hubert du Plessis's 'De Bruid', this interpretative strategy suggests heterogeneous determinations of the text that are constituted solely locally and textually. Such determinations are 'possibilities of presence', while at the same time they negate the very prospect of their realization. Deconstruction accordingly refuses a reading of the text which gives us reality as a knowable whole. What is gained by this suspension of truth is that it does not lead to or entail mastery or suppression of alterity.<sup>30</sup>

The feminist musicologist Ruth Solie argues that to reveal one concept as being different from another already implies a form of prejudice: 'When we identify one thing as unlike the others, we are dividing the world; we ... exclude ... distinguish ... discriminate.'<sup>31</sup> On this view, power accrues not only to those who repress in theory and in practice, but also to whoever is in the position of (theoretically) exposing what is the 'same' and what is 'different'. From this perspective, while refusing to accept stable orders of meaning and of power by disrupting the conceptual economy of language, Derrida can only assent to a history of repression by the disclosure of what he calls the 'violent relationships of the whole of the West to its other'.

Above, we have quoted Derrida when saying that deconstructionist practice has a deeply political character: 'It is not neutral' ... 'it intervenes.'<sup>32</sup> In the domains of ethics and politics, however, social life cannot be organized solely around the (theoretical) dismantling of graven images. Deconstructive practices seem here to be necessarily complementary to practices of constructing and reconstructing ideals, norms, principles and institutions.<sup>33</sup> Bernstein

rigorously questions the 'political' implications of Derrida's anti-rationalist relativity as seen in his reading of Van Gogh's 'Old Shoes with Laces.' For Derrida, art's historicity is dependent on those moments that interrupt it. Affording the painting a place and space that falls outside any normative accounting, Derrida's interpretative demonstration is neither general nor universal, but local and textual. Therefore, nothing secures its 'rightness' other than its rightness 'here and now' and its analogical repeatability.<sup>34</sup>

Arguing that Derrida cannot deny the right of existence to a philosophy of history if deconstruction is so historicizing, Bernstein suggests that deconstruction is a form of philosophical modernism: 'For what is deconstructive reading, the reconnoitring of what cannot be represented in the text, but is yet of the text, but the production/discovery of the sublime moment in each text?'.<sup>35</sup> This 'sublime moment', Bernstein understands as the moment in which the work of art risks meaning, while simultaneously it risks the utter loss of representational meaning. On this view, deconstruction is itself interruptive and modernist, the aesthetic component of interruption being the sublime.

The 'safety' of Derrida's aesthetic sublime undercuts the appeal of art to 'reason,' 'truth,' and 'justice' without offering any concrete alternatives, and landing itself in an implicit contradiction. While it is vital to interrogate received notions of liberty, equality, justice, rights, and the like, to then disassemble them without reassembling them again would be to defraud excluded, marginalized and oppressed groups of an important recourse to action.<sup>36</sup> The 'safety' of the aesthetic sublime is, however, also the moment when art is unconditionally affirmed. By philosophically 'repeating' modernism, Derrida reduces philosophy to a marginalized aesthetic, thereby acceding to the alienation of judgement from truth and morality. The problem is that in so doing, he leaves unknowable the forces that marginalize the aesthetic and, ironically, he also leaves untransformed our contemporary systems of knowing. For, as Bernstein formulates it, in aligning himself with artistic modernism, Derrida by-passes the one question about deconstruction that is determinedly philosophical, namely, what does its critique mean in relation to our dominant habits of knowing and to the role of the excluded 'other' in a rethinking of democratic ideals, principles, practices and institutions?<sup>37</sup>

The gain of Derrida's deconstructive practice is his freedom to engage with the heterogeneous determinations of the text without committing himself to a discourse of belonging and hence to a discourse of truth. Given Bernstein's interpretation, this indeterminacy of the text then becomes the (modernist) ideal of a work of art, namely resistance to interpretation. Such a work of art is without history, subjectivity or truth. This questioning of (supposed) meaning is the subversive function of art, saliently reflected in Derrida's logic of marginality or supplementarity, where a hierarchy is reversed to demonstrate that the marginal has its own centrality – in a vast network of interacting 'centralisms'. This does not lead to the identification of a new centre, but rather, in Jonathan Culler's words, to 'a subversion of the distinctions between essential and inessential, inside and outside'.<sup>38</sup>

Neither Derrida's interpretation of Van Gogh's 'Old Shoes with Laces,' nor the above reading of Du Plessis's 'De Bruid' are interpretative recontextualisations in Richard Rorty's sense of strong 'misreading-writings'. Rather, they are a systematic unravelling (both subjectively and objectively) of the 'essential' meanings of these texts and the exposure of textual 'irrelevancies'. A deconstructive reading of Hubert du Plessis's 'De Bruid' opens up possibilities of meaning

which are all present in the text, yet problematize a coherent reading by disrupting its focus and continuity. Such textual relativism may dispose with the very grounds for engaging in double reading.

In retrospect, it has to be remarked that our deconstructive reading of Du Plessis's 'De Bruid' does not originate in an immanent 'surplus' of meaning inherent in the text which then 'overflows' with its own momentary constellations of meaning. Rather, it is based in a conscious (and conscientious) type of ideology-critical 'double reading' which explores latent figurative meanings of the text to 'illustrate' specific critical perspectives that have been imposed on the interpretation. This approach differs radically from the idea that the relativity of meaning is suggested by the text itself (as is the case with Derridian deconstruction). Ironically, the latter approach points to a 'neo-structuralist' type of textualism in which the subjectively determined theoretical input of the critic is undermined.

The 'neo-structuralist' kind of deconstructive approach does not recognize its own ideological biases. Similarly, in more radical examples of feminist thought, there is the illusion that the analyst may maintain an objective position when interpreting a text. An example of such an ideological 'blindness' is, ironically, the conviction that the identification of difference is in itself discriminatory and repressive. From a more balanced ideology-critical perspective, the recognition of difference – a structural characteristic of all analytic activity – presents the interpreter with an opportunity to critically unmask the figurative dominance operative in all symbolical expression, and to do so from a self-professed ideological stance. Returning to Derrida, his refusal to conceptualize presence (and alterity) in the form of a 'knowable whole' may then be seen as a refusal to participate in the analysis and critique of ideological culture on the level of discourse domination – and therefore of conceptual domination.<sup>39</sup>

In contemporary feminist theory, notions of fluidity may be associated with Derrida's metaphysical idea of flux in a direct, simplistic manner. From the perspective of a more differentiated account of ideological culture, however, the metaphor indicates a 'flow' of meaning which incorporates both the dynamic and the constant, implying a certain balance (that is, interdependence) between the masculine and the feminine, the universal and the individual, and so forth. In radical feminism, on the other hand, there is the tendency towards a structural-dualist type of thought. The emphasis on the constructed and self-constructing character of forms of domination strongly links feminist analysis to postmodernism and poststructuralism. Feminism's sensitivity to power and (ironically) to binary opposition draws explicitly on the thought of Foucault and Derrida. This link is problematized, however, by the fact that feminism is firmly rooted in politics. As Mansbridge and Okin point out, in spite of caution derived from understanding the constructed and biased character of all actual administrations and conceptions of justice, feminism is committed to some sense of justice and rights that transcends any one society. And in spite of caution derived from understanding the processes of false consciousness, feminism must be committed to crediting women's experiences. Furthermore, in spite of caution derived from understanding that any set of settled relations creates imbalances of power and that any form of coercion compromises freedom, feminism must be committed to creating and participating in the legitimate coercion embodied in law.<sup>40</sup> In these respects, feminism differs necessarily and

radically from the thrust of fundamental implications in Foucault, Derrida, and in various other poststructuralists.

- <sup>1</sup> Thomas McCarthy: *Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in Contemporary Critical Theory*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991, p. 98ff.
- <sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida: 'The Ends of Man', in: *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. A. Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 133-5.
- <sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida: *Positions*, tr. A. Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 24.
- <sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida: *Positions*, p. 24.
- <sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida: *Positions*, p. 69. Note that deconstruction itself has become a dominant discourse.
- <sup>6</sup> Thomas McCarthy: *Ideals and Illusions*, p. 99ff.
- <sup>7</sup> Christopher Norris: *Reclaiming Truth: Contribution to a Critique of Cultural Relativism*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996, p. 78.
- <sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida: 'The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of Its Pupils', in: *Diacritics*, Vol. 19, 1983, pp. 3-20, esp. pp. 9-10.
- <sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida: *Positions*, p. 29.
- <sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida: *Positions*, p. 26.
- <sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida: *Of Grammatology*, tr. G. C. Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, p. 10.
- <sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida: *Positions*, p. 93.
- <sup>13</sup> Thomas McCarthy: *Ideals and Illusions*, p. 98.
- <sup>14</sup> Thomas McCarthy: *Ideals and Illusions*, p. 107ff.
- <sup>15</sup> See the 'Restitution' essay that concludes Derrida's *The Truth in Painting*, tr. G. Bennington & I. McCleod. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987; also the discussion in Christopher Norris & Andrew Benjamin's *What is Deconstruction?* London: Academy Editions, 1988, pp. 18-20. Our argument sets up a more intensive dialogue, however, with Jay M. Bernstein's analysis of Derrida's essay in *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, pp. 135-75.
- <sup>16</sup> Thomas McCarthy: *Ideals and Illusions*, p. 107ff; Richard Bernstein: 'Serious Play: The Ethical-Political Horizon of Jacques Derrida', in: *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1987, pp. 93-115; Jacques Derrida & Mustapha Tlili: *For Nelson Mandela*. New York: Seaver Books, 1987, pp. 13-42.
- <sup>17</sup> Thomas McCarthy: *Ideals and Illusions*, p. 107ff.
- <sup>18</sup> Edward Aitchison: 'Hubert du Plessis', in: *Composers in South Africa Today*, ed. Peter Klatzow. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 33-76, esp. p. 43.
- <sup>19</sup> Edward Aitchison: *Composers in South Africa Today*, p. 45.
- <sup>20</sup> Hélène Cixous: 'The Laugh of Medusa', in: *Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. Andy Warhol & Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991, pp. 334-49; Julia Kristeva: *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982 and Mary Douglas: *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- <sup>21</sup> Hendrik Marsman: *Verzameld Werk*. Amsterdam: Querido, 1979, p. 5. Marsman's representations of women are decidedly ambivalent. While his poetic constructions of the feminine 'other' point to cosmic sublimation, he simultaneously draws on pejorative metaphors to portray women as contemptible and treacherous. An example of this is his powerful poem 'Woman'.
- <sup>22</sup> Reprinted here with the kind permission of Em. Querido.
- <sup>23</sup> Edward Aitchison: *Composers in South Africa Today*, p. 45.
- <sup>24</sup> Mary Douglas: *Purity and Danger*.
- <sup>25</sup> Elsie Suzanne Human de Villiers: 'Metaphors of Excess: Eruption and Outburst', forthcoming.

- <sup>26</sup> The composer pointed out these intertextual connections during an informal interview with Stephanus Muller and Nicol Viljoen, 11 June 2002.
- <sup>27</sup> Hans-Jürgen Winterhoff: *Analytische Untersuchungen zu Puccinis 'Tosca'*. Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1973, p. 50ff.
- <sup>28</sup> De Villiers: 'Metaphors of Excess: Eruption and Outburst.'
- <sup>29</sup> In applications of deconstruction to musical analysis, Derrida's term *supplement* has been widely misinterpreted. Peter Hadreas ('Deconstruction and the Meaning of Music', in: *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1999, pp. 5-28) understands 'supplementarity (as) a semiological strategy whereby concepts, or objects which have their sense through relations to other concepts or objects, are taken to be "closed"'. This is the exact opposite of Derrida's objective of devising paradoxical terms (such as 'supplement', 'trace', and 'difference') which cannot be reduced to any stable order of meaning. For Derrida, the supplement haunts and frustrates every move to contain it. In his reading of Beethoven's Sonata Opus 111, Lawrence Kramer (*Music as Cultural Practice 1800-1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, p. 24) misinterprets Derrida's notion of the supplement as '... the completion of something that at first seems complete in itself'. Thus, in Kramer's view, the supplement is a logical 'balance' which 'completes' a creative idea – an understanding completely stripped of Derrida's deconstructive leverage.
- <sup>30</sup> Jay M. Bernstein: *The Fate of Art*, p. 156.
- <sup>31</sup> Ruth Solie: 'Introduction', in: *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, p. 2ff.
- <sup>32</sup> Jacques Derrida: *Positions*, p. 93.
- <sup>33</sup> Thomas McCarthy: *Ideals and Illusions*, p. 107ff.
- <sup>34</sup> Jay M. Bernstein: *The Fate of Art*, p. 136ff.
- <sup>35</sup> Jay M. Bernstein: *The Fate of Art*, p. 158.
- <sup>36</sup> Thomas McCarthy: *Ideals and Illusions*, p. 112.
- <sup>37</sup> Jay M. Bernstein: *The Fate of Art*, p. 159.
- <sup>38</sup> Jonathan Culler: *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 140.
- <sup>39</sup> Cf. the work of John Thompson, in particular *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, as well as Johann Visagie's 'Power, Meaning and Culture: John Thompson's Depth Hermeneutics and the Ideological Topography of Modernity', in: *South African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1996, pp. 73-83. Thompson's treatment of language and power specifically analyses the ways in which language *facilitates* forms of power, pointing to relations of *systematic domination*. Thompson thus formulates the relation between language and ideology in terms of the asymmetrical organization of social relations. Visagie's model is designed to give a comprehensive account of the specific *forces* comprising ideological culture. This attempt at a mapping of ideological culture differs from Thompson's model in that it not only sets out to account for relations of domination between social *groups*, but also seeks to specify cultural *discourses of domination* – where *goals* or *values* act as agents of conceptual domination. The value of Visagie's model and its particular relevance for an analysis of ambiguous symbolic forms (such as musical texts) is exactly this commitment (in principle) to a double-edged critique of ideology. For a more detailed explication of Visagie's model and its relation to musical texts, see Martina Viljoen: 'Questions of Musical Meaning: An Ideology-Critical Approach', in: *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 3-28.
- <sup>40</sup> Jane Mansbridge & Susan Moller Okin: 'Feminism', in: *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, eds. R. E. Goodin & P. Pettit. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, pp. 269-90.



# BEING ROSA

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Chris Walton



Rosa Sophia Cornelia Nepgen, undated (image supplied by Special Collections Section of the J.S. Gericke Library, University of Stellenbosch)

A weighty madam called Rosa,  
Fancied herself a composer;  
Her setting of verse  
Could hardly be worse –  
Yet no one has the guts to expose her.

This limerick to Rosa Nepgen, found by a colleague of the present writer in the documents of Dirkie de Villiers in the National Afrikaans Literary Museum and Research Centre in Bloemfontein (NALN), is anonymous, though it is preserved in a hand remarkably similar to that of the composer and sometime poet, Hubert du Plessis.<sup>1</sup> Quoting it here is perhaps less than politically correct, for it is not merely implicitly sexist but also offensive to the circumferentially challenged. I hope that my reading of it might serve in lieu of an apology to the shade of Rosa Nepgen, for in fact it presents, in pithy form, the questions I want to deal with in my exploration of her life and music. Why did she ‘fancy herself a composer’; and was it indeed mere egotistical fancy, or could she really compose? Why did she set verse? And if it could hardly be worse, why did no one ‘have the guts to expose’ her? Perhaps most importantly: why would anyone want to? The world is full of bad composers who do no harm



and who offend no one, except perhaps their immediate family and friends upon whom they inflict their music. If Rosa was so bad, why did the author of the limerick deem her important enough to celebrate her in verse? And if exposing her were so important to him, why did he himself not have the 'guts' to do it, even going so far as to leave his incriminating poem anonymous?

But before we go any further, let us first have a few biographical details. Rosa Sophia Cornelia Nepgen was born in Barkly East on 12 December 1909. She received her first musical instruction from her mother, with her later teachers including Dirk Meerkotter, Ellen Norburn and Stephanie Faure. Nepgen studied at the University of the Witwatersrand under Percival Kirby and others, and was subsequently appointed to a teaching post at that institution. She also acted as organist for the Dutch Reformed Church in the Johannesburg suburb of Melville, and taught piano to the children of Hendrik Verwoerd, when he was editor of the *Transvaler*. Nepgen married the Afrikaans poet William Ewart Gladstone Louw in 1944, and together they moved to Grahamstown, when Gladstone was appointed Professor of Afrikaans and Dutch at Rhodes University. In 1954 the Louws made an extended visit to Europe, during which time Nepgen studied at the Amsterdam Conservatory under Ernst Mulder, Peter Frankl and Henk Badings. They moved to Cape Town in 1957 when Gladstone was made Arts Editor of *Die Burger* (to which paper Nepgen also contributed occasional concert reviews). In 1966 Gladstone was appointed professor at the University of Stellenbosch, though the Louws did not move there until two years later, in 1968.



Rosa Nepgen and W.E.G. (Gladstone) Louw, undated (image supplied by Special Collections Section of the J.S. Gericke Library, University of Stellenbosch)

The major part of Nepgen's oeuvre comprises settings of Afrikaans poetry for voice and piano, and includes many songs on texts by her husband and his brother, the poet N.P. van Wyk Louw. Several volumes of her songs were published in her lifetime. Her style, which remained largely tonal, displays the influence of the Hindemith of the late 1930s and 1940s. She possessed a certain gift for melody of a Neo-Classical slant, though this is often hampered by a lack of convincing harmonic direction. Commissions included one from the King's Singers in 1972. In later years Nepgen learnt Italian, and translated many poems by the Nobel Prize winner Eugenio Montale, with whom she was acquainted. Gladstone Louw died in 1980, Rosa in 2000.

Nepgen's CV is thus hardly an embarrassment. She was married to one of the finest Afrikaans poets, she studied with impressive figures on the South African and European scene, and more of her songs were published than of many of her South African contemporaries. And yet she seems to have inspired them mostly as a figure of fun. I have it on good authority that one of Arnold van Wyk's party pieces comprised his giving a composition lesson to an imaginary Rosa standing at his side, with him indulging in a searing, patronising critique, note for note, of her 'Nine Metaphysical Songs'. And a consideration of Rosa Nepgen cannot but mention the now notorious tale of the hospital visit Hubert du Plessis paid to Arnold van Wyk when the latter was on his deathbed. The two men were not particularly close, having been more rivals than friends. Van Wyk was supposedly more or less in a coma. Hubert du Plessis asked: 'Nols, can you hear me? Do you know who's speaking?', only to receive the mocking answer: 'Rosa'.

But the author quoted at the beginning of this paper was not the only person to have pilloried Rosa Nepgen in words. The most famous example is the short story *Die sous* [The Sauce] by Hennie Aucamp, first published in 1973, the year of Gladstone's sixtieth birthday. It is a brilliant, thinly veiled depiction of a day in the life of the Louws, called here Daddy and Lammie. It is Daddy's birthday, and

Lammie wakes up with a song in her heart and wants straightaway to begin humming it. But Daddy is still fast asleep alongside her. She looks at him tenderly: a fat, pink, disgruntled baby moaning as he dreams. Only she knows him in his lesser moments, only she knows that he snores and suffers from heartburn, and that he breaks little winds when he is anxious. O, that it should be her to whom it is granted to know this great mind also as a man!<sup>2</sup>

Lammie tries to compose the song that is forming in her brain, but doesn't quite manage. Daddy emerges and they breakfast together:

'Lammie', he asks concernedly over his muesli, 'have you got a migraine?'

She shakes her head. 'No, Daddy.'

'Come now, my treasure, there's something bothering you?'

'Daddy', she says bashfully, 'if you have to choose between two titles, which would it be? *A little song*, or just *A song*? [literally: 'songlet']

'Lammie!', rejoices Daddy, 'how stupid of me: you're creating!'

'It's not come yet, Daddy, but it's stirring.'

'I'll keep my fingers crossed,' promises Daddy, and eats on, cheerfully.<sup>3</sup>

The body of the story is taken up with Lammie's preparations for the evening meal, in particular with an immensely complicated sauce. The latter waits on the dinner table in a silver vessel, next to a little vase with a single rose in it. But The Sauce is not destined to be consumed:

'This isn't a sauce for mere mortals,' stammers Daddy. 'Let us offer it up.' And with a priest-like gesture, he pours The Sauce into the open, innocent roses . . . For a moment, the odours contend with each other: the languid, sweet fragrance of the roses and the complex meat-and-herb aroma of a master sauce. Then comes relief: the smell of the roses is conquered.<sup>4</sup>

One can naturally interpret the close of the story in several ways, not least because of the choice of flower being a pun on Rosa Nepgen's name. There is a blatantly sexual metaphor involved when Daddy pours his sauce 'into the open, innocent roses.' However, the real point of the story lies in the manner in which Lammie and Daddy aspire to transform the banalities of everyday existence into moments of poetry – and to this I shall return a little later.

The urge amongst certain of Rosa's contemporaries to parody her seems almost to have been compulsive. But parody, of course, always says as much about its author as about its object. Theodor Adorno once wrote perceptively, with regard to the influence of Franz Schreker on Alban Berg, that 'one parodies that to which one is naturally drawn, even if one's feelings towards it are ambivalent.'<sup>5</sup> In other words – though with a hint of exaggeration, perhaps – Du Plessis, Van Wyk, and those others who pilloried Rosa, did so because they were drawn to her, even envied her. I would go even further and say that, on one level, they wanted to *be* Rosa (hence the title of this chapter). Not, of course, that any of them harboured secret, transsexual desires about being a large, second-rate, female composer; but neither Rosa's circumference nor her composing really had much to do with it. Her real significance lay elsewhere.

The picture Hennie Aucamp paints in his short story of two self-absorbed, snobbish aesthetes in whom reality and self-parody can barely be separated is in fact remarkably close to what the present writer has heard of the Louws from people who knew them personally. Parody, of course, is all the more deadly when it entails no more than a quarter-turn of the screw to achieve absurdity. There is undoubtedly an element in the Louws' relationship that seems to have been ripe for parody. They would appear to have been the perfect married couple, which is itself always good for a laugh. We know from family friends and acquaintances that Gladstone was always the first person to hear Rosa's songs, often being called upon to give his commentary and critique before they were finished. Gladstone in turn would read his half-finished poems to Rosa. Tears would flow on both sides when reading a poem or listening to a song together. Mealtimes would apparently be taken with Rosa and Gladstone at either end of a long table. Guests would be seated in the middle, and wine would be brought by servants, served, sipped and then ostentatiously sent back if it were deemed inadequate. Reports of the Louws' domestic situation remind me not a little of the picture painted by Cosima Wagner's diaries of family life at the Wagners (though since those diaries were not published until 1976, the Louws could not have been influenced by them). Gladstone and Rosa do, however, seem positively to have cultivated the Romantic notion of the creative artist. Just like Lammie and Daddy in *Die Sous*, they seem to have tried to live as they wanted to be seen to live – to use

a comparison from our own times, they were at once the producers, the housemates and the viewing public of their own Big Brother event. Or, to use a more appropriate metaphor, they seem to have been living out a romanticized, self-imagined biography of themselves as might have been written by an adoring acolyte at the close of the nineteenth century.

The reasons why their domestic practices should have taken this turn are, perhaps, to be found in the *Derde Afrikaanse Beweging*, the Third Afrikaans Movement, in particular in the relationship to music of the *Dertiger* poets [i.e. the poets of the 1930s]. These men took a keen interest in matters musical – Gladstone himself penned his first articles on music in the early 1930s, and music continued to occupy his thoughts and his writings over the ensuing decades. In his famous book *Digers van dertig*, D. J. Opperman writes of this period as follows:

In short, this was the time of the *lied*, with Leipoldt and A. D. Keet as its heralds . . . In the poets of the 30s, we find an early interest in song, both folksong and art song. Composers are on the lookout for poems to set to music; some poets of the 30s write poems that seem intended to be set to music . . . we find a cult of the *lied* in the 1920s in Eitemal, I.D. du Plessis, N.P. van Wyk Louw and Uys Krige, and to a much lesser extent in C.M. van den Heever; after 1930, we find it again, more in the work of W.E.G. Louw. W.E.G. Louw writes articles on music in *Die Burger* and *Die Wapenskou*; and he marries the composer Rosa C. Nepgen, who set *Die Dieper Reg*, among other poems. We also often find the *lied* and music in general being extolled in the poetry of the writers of the 1930s.<sup>6</sup>

When reading through literary and other journals of that period, one cannot escape the impression that the pioneers of Afrikaans poetry and prose felt that their success in forging a new language of culture would be measured in part by the extent to which an indigenous art-song tradition could be established. The closest European links cultivated by these writers tended to be with the Netherlands. The musical traditions of Holland were in turn closely allied to Germany – Wagner-fever had hit Holland even before most other countries in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, while leading Dutch establishment figures such as Willem Mengelberg had ensured Austro-German hegemony in matters musical. It seems to me that, when the *Dertiger* poets wrote and thought of art song, they had in mind primarily the marriage of words and music as found in the German *lied*. The examples of Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Wolf showed how poetry in a specific language could, through the medium of music, achieve significance and fame far beyond its linguistic borders (after all, the poetry of Goethe, Mörike, Heine and others is sung all over the world by people who would never think of reading or reciting it as poetry alone). While it is possible that the early Afrikaans poets hoped that music might provide a means for promoting their new, minority language throughout the rest of the ‘cultured’ world much more quickly than would otherwise be possible, there would also be major benefits closer to home. If the literature in this newly codified language was to thrive, then it would have to provoke a critical response, it would have to build a critical discourse around itself. A musical setting of any text is by necessity an act of interpretation of it, a commentary, a critique. If an indigenous, Afrikaans art-song tradition could be established, then this would itself form a body of ‘commentaries’ on Afrikaans poetry, but one that would be utterly safe on account of its non-linguistic, purely musical nature: it would be a form of ‘non-critical’ criticism, so to speak, that would serve only to affirm positively the status of the language and its literature. Furthermore, the

creators of an Afrikaans art-song tradition would presumably be ideological companions of those writers who were forging the language itself. Both parties would be infused with the same nationalistic, idealistic fervour. Thus, the danger of the fledgling writers of this fledgling literature in this fledgling language being subjected to adverse comment by their artistic peers would be minimal. In imagining an Afrikaans art song, the *Dertiger* poets were imagining less the song itself than the applause resounding after its final chords – though an applause that in their minds was directed primarily at the poem, not at the music to which it was set.

There is, however, a major discrepancy between the musical notions of the *Dertiger* poets and the musical realities of Afrikaans song; they may have dreamed of Wolf and Schubert, but what they got was in fact sub-Quilter. For if one examines the music of the ‘pioneers’ of Afrikaans song, as the *South African Music Encyclopedia* calls them,<sup>7</sup> such as Johannes Joubert, P.J. Lemmer and S. le Roux Marais, and whose earliest Afrikaans songs date from the late 1920s and early 1930s, one in fact finds them influenced more by the English parlour song than by the German *lied*. For while the poets they set were allied to European Germanic culture, these composers were not; they had studied in London, and one can hear it. In a sense, the establishment of the Afrikaans art song had the unplanned, unexpected effect of actually bridging the Afrikaner-English divide it was meant to perpetuate by establishing the language as a serious rival to English in South African society. Many of these songs are in fact very attractive, and deserve their place in the repertoire. However, their neo-Victorian idiom is a far cry from the German art song and also places them a world apart – well, half a world – from the contemporary European and American music of their day. Their carefully crafted melodies with their periodic structures and tonal harmonies serve to cast the poem into sharp relief. Even when their composers do not choose the best poems to set, there is no great discrepancy in quality between words and music; there is no parallel to, say, those songs of Schubert that turn banal texts into great musical works of art. In fact, while one should perhaps not generalize, the poetry they set is on the whole far better than the music they compose to it.

The problem of quality is one that faces us in the songs of Rosa Nepgen, too, though with a different slant. Rosa was undoubtedly possessed of more than a modicum of literary taste, and also had her husband to guide her. She wrote of the aforementioned ‘pioneers’ as follows:

The earlier song composers thought more about the melody than about the words, and more or less fixed the words to the melody, without the two really belonging together . . . each verse, good or bad, like each piece of prose, has a kind of underlying speech melody. There are those who have an ear and a feel for language such that it is easy for them to become aware of it. If such a person is also a composer, then you’re going to write songs.<sup>8</sup>

Rosa is here presumably referring to composers such as Hugo Wolf or, closer to her time, Benjamin Britten, both of whom in their songs showed literary taste and a fine sensitivity to the accents and rhythms of their native tongue. She is also, obviously, putting herself forward as a composer who can do the same in Afrikaans. And her settings are undoubtedly far more sensitive to the language than are those of Lemmer, Le Roux Marais or Joubert. The article quoted above was published in *Die Burger* in 1959, when her husband was editor of the arts

page, and thus responsible for publishing it. We can thus probably regard it as a kind of joint *credo* of the Louws regarding the setting to music of the Afrikaans language.

Nepgen and Louw were in fact both part of the same grand project – namely, the establishment of Afrikaans as a language of culture – and they seem to have been very much aware of the fact. In the passage quoted earlier from Opperman's *Digters van Dertig*, published in 1953, there is a remark that might be coincidental, but is certainly telling: almost in the same breath, he tells us that Gladstone Louw wrote about music; and married the composer Rosa Nepgen. There seems here to hover above his semi-colon an unspoken 'therefore', as if Gladstone married Rosa because she was a composer, as if his marriage was intended literally to marry his words to her music, with Rosa's purpose being to provide the musical flower into which Gladstone was to pour his poetic sauce. Almost every marriage has its division of labour; for example, while one partner changes the baby's nappies, the other prepares its bottle for the night (here speaks the voice of experience). But with Gladstone and Rosa, the one wrote words, the other their music (although Rosa naturally did not confine herself to setting her husband's words to music; a large part of her oeuvre indeed comprises settings of poems by both W.E.G. and N.P. van Wyk Louw).

However, just as in Aucamp's short story the scent of the rose is smothered by that of the sauce, so in Rosa's songs it is the poetry that dominates. It is at times almost as if she writes background music to the poetry, rather like the melodramas that were once so popular in the German-speaking world in the nineteenth century, except that Rosa has her texts sung rather than recited. To write that the underlying intonation of the language itself must be paramount is in fact a thinly-veiled way of saying that it is the poet, not the composer, who really provides the foundations of the music. Indeed, it seems to me that it is precisely Rosa's determination to follow the nuances of the text that deprives her songs of any real musical direction. For the very same reason, the early Afrikaans songs that she criticizes for forcing words to music, even the most shamelessly strophic ones, are on the whole more successful than hers.

To what extent Rosa Nepgen was incapable of giving her music its head, to what extent unwilling to do so, is difficult to tell. To suggest that her music's subordination to the text is a reflection of the gender-based hierarchies in her marriage, in which her husband was not just the famous creative artist but also the bread-winner, might seem overly simplistic, but is probably not far from the truth. It would be fascinating to analyse her settings of her husband's verses to see if there are in fact gestures or shifts in accentuation that might suggest a subverting of the poetry's dominance; but that would be a major analytical task beyond the scope of this intentionally biographical chapter. Furthermore, nothing in Rosa's published output that the present writer has consulted thus far suggests that her compositional gifts would have been up to such a task, either consciously or subconsciously attempted.

This apparent gap between aspiration and achievement on the part of Rosa Nepgen, and her unawareness of this, is most probably one reason why she became ripe for parody. The fact that her husband seems to have shared this lack of awareness, as they shared so much else, probably increased the temptation to parody, for Gladstone was nothing if not highly cultured. But if one approaches Rosa's songs from a primarily literary rather than a musical standpoint – as it seems both she and Gladstone did – then her failings tend to fade into



the background, and Gladstone's staunch support of her endeavours appears less the blind adoration of a husband than the understandable, if selfish, view of a poet who simply puts his words first, and music second: *prima la parole, doppia la musica*. As it happens, their principal creative collaboration, apart from Rosa's songs, was also primarily literary. In 1958 they published under both their names an Afrikaans translation of Handel's *Messiah*. This would itself provide enough fodder for at least a Master's dissertation. It was made in the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the first translation of the Afrikaans Bible, and translates not just the language, but also the context of the *Messiah* – the shepherds in the fields become 'herders in die oop veld' – with the Jews and the Afrikaners strangely merging in the shape of God's Chosen People.

Rosa also fought long and hard with her own Dutch Reformed Church, which she felt had wrongly turned its back on the old Genevan Psalter. However, this should be seen less as a woman's battle against patriarchal, ecclesiastical hierarchies than a determination to expunge English-Victorian influences from Dutch Reformed hymnody, and thus an extension of her and her husband's battle for Afrikaans culture. Rosa even went so far as to publish her own Psalter in 1966, setting the translations of Totius as far as possible to the old Genevan melodies. In a few cases she used her own psalm settings instead, and I suspect that this was the real *raison d'être* of the exercise. For linking herself with Totius in this historical context is a means of asserting both her own and his cultural lineage. They, she implies, are the true artistic heirs of the early Protestants; she is thus acquiring historical justification for her work as if it were a commodity to be bought. The problem of manufacturing a 'history' to justify one's endeavours was one that greatly occupied not just Rosa Nepgen, but the artistic establishment in South Africa as a whole in the middle of the twentieth century. In 1947 Arnold van Wyk complained of this very fact in a letter to Jan Bouws (also quoted in the contribution by Stephanus Muller in this book):

... we are so aware of the fact that we have achieved but little in art that we want to create a tradition overnight, as well as a proud history. Everyone paints if the brush does not fall out of their hands, and everyone writes if they possess only a thorough knowledge of grammar and in an overview of composers Hubert du Plessis is compared to M.L. de Villiers.<sup>9</sup>

There is, of course, an irony in that at a time when, in Europe, artists were trying to erase the memory of fascism by escaping from existing artistic traditions, South African artists were desperately trying to create one (which is also, no doubt, in part an explanation for the enduring conservatism of most South African composers in the ensuing decades). The Louws were similar to other Afrikaans creative artists of the day in that they were essentially the cultural equivalent of *nouveau riche*, in other words, their culture had not been passed down through the generations, but had been acquired or invented more or less overnight. The present writer is reminded of a quip once made about the film stars of days gone by, namely that the aristocracy of Hollywood was made up of those who could trace back their lineage as far as their father. There were in fact attempts by others to acknowledge the humble beginnings of Afrikaans culture by romanticizing, even glorifying them – much as there have been times in the past decades when having a working-class accent in Britain would have been considered the height of chic. Thus, in *Die Westerse kultuur in Suid-Afrika* [Western Culture in South Africa], a seminal book published by the University of Pretoria in 1963

and edited by one of the most important early theorists of apartheid, Geoffrey Cronjé, the 'boereplaas' [boer's farm] is listed alongside the Afrikaans language and the Church as one of the three pillars of Western culture amongst the Afrikaner people.<sup>10</sup>

But such sophistries do not seem to have appealed to the Louws, who belonged unashamedly to the aristocracy of Afrikaans High Culture. Rosa was a published composer and a friend of the Verwoerd household, while her husband was not just a leading poet and the brother of an even better one, but arts editor of the most important Afrikaans newspaper and thereafter professor at Stellenbosch. They were thus more or less at the centre of cultural power in the South Africa of the 1950s and '60s.

The pioneering efforts of Gladstone and his fellow *Dertiger* poets to turn what had recently been a kitchen language into a vehicle for High Art are mirrored in the domestic life of the Louws, in which even the kitchen sink aspires to be aestheticized. Just as the bastard language of former slaves and farmers became beautified, so too did these descendants of the slaves and farmers now aspire to live as princes amongst beautiful things. While such a case of over-compensation suggests no small degree of uncertainty, if not inferiority, on the part of the Louws, the very fact that they attracted the parodic attention of others is a sign of how successful they really were. Hubert du Plessis and Arnold van Wyk poured scorn on Rosa not because she was their inferior as a composer – though of course she was (their own position as the leading composers domiciled in South Africa in the 1960s was surely uncontested) – but because she had succeeded in penetrating the inner circle of cultural Afrikanerdom in a manner that they had not, and never would, on account of their homosexuality. Not all the Rain Dances in the world could compensate a Hubert du Plessis for not being heterosexual; and had Rosa's setting of verse been even worse, they still wouldn't have had the guts to expose her.

<sup>1</sup> The present writer would like to thank Stephanus Muller for his generosity in providing him with this and much other material in the course of writing this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Hennie Aucamp: 'Die Soud', in: *Brandglas. 'n Keuse uit sy verhale*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1987, pp. 55-60. 'Lammie word met 'n lied in die hart wakker en wil dit dadelik begin neurie, maar langs haar is Daddy nog vas aan die slaap. Sy kyk vertederd na hom: 'n vet, pienk, onvergenoegde baba wat kreun in sy droom. Net sý ken hom in mindere oomblikke; net sý weet dat hy snork en aan sooi-brand ly, en windjies laat as hy benoud is. O, dat juis sý dié groot gees ook as mens durf ken!' [All translations here are by the present writer].

<sup>3</sup> "Lammie", vra hy besorg oor sy muesli, "het jy 'n migraine?"

Sy skud haar kop. "Nee, Daddy."

"Kom nou, my skat, daar's iets wat jou kwel?"

"Daddy", sê sy skaam, "as jy moes kies tussen dié twee titels, watter een sal dit wees? *Klein liedjie*, of sommer net *Liedjie*?"

"Lammie!" jubel Daddy, "hoe dom van my: jy skép!"

"Dit het nog nie gekom nie, Daddy; maar die roering is daar."

"Ek hou duim vas," beloof Daddy, en eet opgeruimd verder."

<sup>4</sup> "Dis nie 'n sous vir sterwelinge nie," sê [Daddy] met 'n gebroke stem. "Jy pleng dit". En met 'n priesterlike gebaar skink hy Die Soud op die oop, onskuldige rose . . .

'n Oomblik stry die geure teen mekaar: die mat soet geur van rose en die komplekse vleis-en-

kruiegeur van 'n meestersous. Dan kom verligting: die roosgeur is verslaan.

<sup>5</sup> Theodor W. Adorno: *Alban Berg: Der Meister des kleinsten Übergangs*. Vienna: Lafitte, 1968, p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> D. J. Opperman: *Digters van Dertig*. Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel Beperk, 1953, p. 20.

'Kortom, dit is met Leipoldt en A. D. Keet as voorlopers die tydperk van die lied . . . By die Dertigers vind ons aanvanklik 'n belangstelling in die lied, die volksliedjie en kunslied. Die komponiste is op soek na gedigte om te toonset; party Dertigers skryf liedjies as 't ware om getoonset te word . . . 'n Lied-kultus vind ons in die twintiger jare by Eitemal, I. D. du Plessis, N. P. van Wyk Louw en Uys Krige; en in veel minder mate by C. M. van den Heever; ná dertig weer meer by W. E. G. Louw. W.E.G. Louw skryf artikels oor die musiek in *Die Burger* en *Die Wapenskou*; en hy tree in die huwelik met die komponiste Rosa C. Nepgen, wat onder meer *Die Dieper Reg* toonset . . . Ons vind ook dat die lied en die musiek dikwels in die poësie van die Dertigers verheerlik word.'

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. the entries on S. le Roux Marias and P. J. Lemmer.

<sup>8</sup> Rosa Nepgen: 'Afrikaans sing ook lekker!,' in: *Die Burger*, 6 April 1959. 'Die vroeëre liederkomponiste het meer aan die melodie as aan die woorde gedink, en toe min of meer die woorde aan die melodie vasgemaak, sonder dat die twee werklik aan mekaar behoort het . . . Elke vers, goed of sleg, en elke stuk prosa, het 'n soort onderliggende taalmelodie en sommige mense se oor en taalgevoel is so ingestel dat hulle maklik daarvan bewus is. As so 'n mens nou komponis is, dan skryf jy soms liedere'

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Arnold van Wyk to Jan Bouws, 27 February 1947, translated from the Afrikaans; Nasionale Afrikaanse Letterkundige Museum en Navorsingsentrum (NALN), Bloemfontein, MM20/79/11.-45.

<sup>10</sup> H. M. van der Westhuysen: 'Die gestalte van die Westerse leefwyse by die Afrikaner,' in: G. Cronjé, ed.: *Die Westerse kultuur in Suid-Afrika*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1963, pp. 48-9. 'Die Afrikaanse boereplaas het die wieg geword van 'n nuwe Westerse nasie met 'n eie landelike kultuurpatroon.'

# MUSIC IS A WOMAN

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Meki Nzewi & Sello Galane

## Gender and power in the West

The modern gender palaver needs a brief historical, global reflection before evoking it in the context of musical arts discourse in contemporary African mental and cultural ecology. Industrial revolution in Europe generated social revolution. That in turn promoted the doctrine of individualism, which engendered the economic-political ideology of capitalist democracy now masterminding the globalization agenda. The historical evolution of the Western notion of modernism generated human and social stresses that disrupted family bonding. This impacted adversely on traditional gender roles and power play. Men, the more abrasive and venturesome gender, invented and dominated the social and political structures of modernism. The self-centred mission of modernism contrived justification, *à la* religious jingoism, for launching colonizing expeditions to expropriate the other (colonized) peoples' wealth needed to make the machinery of modernism function at home. The male minds powering modernism discovered that economic empire-building thrives on feuds and conflicts. So they engineered the politics of human conflicts as well as invented the weapons for aggravating or resolving such conflicts in manners that advance the economic aspirations of the barons of feudalistic modernism. The men monopolized the production and management of the machinery of social, religious and political organization strategic for propagandizing, consolidating and exporting the demagoguery of modernism, which translates into capitalist democracy.

More and more, the Western woman was disenfranchised and relegated to a lower rank politically, religiously, economically and socially, without even the consolation of controlling family power. A modern philosophy of society had emerged that prescribed that the person who commands the economic power should dictate the tenor of relationships. The modern religions ruled by men contrived and enforced the absurd dogma that the woman is only worth the rib of the man. This religious dogma helped the Western man to consolidate his dominion over the faith-silenced woman. And yet it is in the womb, the generative core of the woman, that the man is formed as a living being. It is through her that the domineering man gains access into the world, and her milk as well as care nurture man into personhood. Luckily the woman did not contrive to stifle the mother-dominating Western man at birth.

The modern societal ideology of domineering man and submissive woman could not fail to breed boredom and distress for the woman, especially as the genius of modernism reduced homely care and chores. The vision and reasoning of the marginalized, suppressed and idle Western woman eventually changed, and she started questioning the unjust gender status quo. The need arose to challenge and disprove the theory about the Western woman being regarded as a mere rib, and, therefore, a mere fractional substance of the product of her gestation and lactation. The religious dogma that lacks scientific proof had hypnotized the

woman's vision and notion of self for generations of religious subjugation. Scientific proof had replaced trust and belief systems in the intellectual canons of Western modern systems dubbed 'scholarship procedure'.

The Western man, sensing danger to his power construction, started opening doors for the woman to glimpse the corridors and enchantment of power. But the ingenious man merely made tokenistic gestures, and would not allow the woman much elbow room to compete for, or share in, the economic, political, intellectual and socio-cultural leadership. These are the man's solidly consolidated power bases that accord high social and public visibility. The self-asserting and high visibility oriented, postmodern Western woman was becoming extremely frustrated. Even the efforts to contest gender discrimination at family level were being scuttled by the men.

The gender palaver was threatening to escalate into a gender war, yet men were determined to yield no appreciable ground to the woman. The Western woman in search of high public visibility became constrained to shift her ambition for a power base elsewhere in foreign territories. The obvious territory became Africa, already politically, mentally and economically conquered by the Western man. The Western man was only too glad to support his woman counterpart to seek high visibility anywhere else but at home. The Western woman set about to invent herself as the self-elected champion of the emancipation of fully emancipated African womanhood. She started to export and impose the social, cultural and gender problems plaguing the West on Africa's secure mental civilization and cultural practices. And so the propaganda about gender inequality and discrimination in Africa was invented and flogged into believability, thanks to the power of modern media propaganda machinery. The modern African élites (men and women), had become too mentally and culturally intimidated, and were only too eager to be recruited as disciples.

Thus, when the Western woman christened the African practice of circumcision of boys and girls as genital mutilation in the case of women, the modern, élite African woman took up the battle cry. Neither the Western advocate nor the African parrot bothered to understand the virtue in the African practice of initiations that accorded emotional security and social status as well as integration to the circumcised, female or male. The African practice, which also managed sexual behaviour, was torpedoed, thereby fertilizing the ground for the implantation of the foreign maladies of promiscuity and social-emotional insecurity.

The export of the contemporary gender palaver, which makes sense in the Western social and political systems, aggravated the mental deviation and cultural alienation of modern Africans. The neo-colonization started destabilizing the traditional socio-political power structure in which the African woman wielded superior authority, albeit without high public visibility.

### **Gender and power in Africa**

In Africa, on the other hand, gender was not an issue before Western modernism invaded, colonized and deconstructed Africa's worldview and socio-cultural knowledge systems. The worth of the African woman was not philosophized or rationalized as the rib of a man. Conversely, the woman was celebrated as the metaphysical source or the ritual owner of the man. Gender relationships and roles were rationalized in a manner that did not entail

repression, nor the attendant social-emotional stresses. Traditional gender consciousness and role performance in African socio-cultural life had philosophical and physiological underpinnings that implicated the etiology and allocation of strength. The male spirit manifested as visible but ephemeral power; the female spirit emanated as discreet but ultimate power. The man ordered the woman; the woman managed the man. The man moved in front; the woman dictated the pace and direction of the man from behind. And an African maxim has it that 'what a woman withstands in life breaks a man'. The woman's deeper perceptions about life eluded the man. A Pedi maxim further has it that 'Mother of a child (woman) holds the knife on its sharpest side' (*Mmangwana o tshwara thipa ka bogaleng*). There is no equivalent maxim for the strength or bravery or endurance of the man.

In most traditional African cultures the man was apportioned the resonant power of traditional governance, which entailed loud bursts of actions, and abrupt cadence to life. The woman commanded the harmonious tunefulness of family and communal power play, which effectively contained men's exuberance, and in periods of discord actually stopped men's exhibition of violent developmental energy. The woman's traditional socio-political power was evoked at periods of crises as the ultimate judgmental action, and derived from her ritual authority as the embodiment of the crucible of procreation and nurture. The woman's source of authority derived from being in control of the gratification of life sustenance (edible food) and generative sustenance (sensual food). The woman commanded on a regular basis the obedience of the entire family by the authority of her traditional role of processing, cooking and apportioning edible food. It was out of bounds for the man to cook, serve himself food, or interfere in any manner with the process of preparing food in a family. Nor did traditional mores allow the man to dare insist on sexual gratification that does not involve a consenting woman. Thus the politics of cooking gave to the woman a subtle and effective authority over the man in times of social and political crises. Inter-communal conflicts involving battles have been resolved by women through exercising the power of denying edible and spiritual-sensual food to intransigent male fighters.

### **African gender sentiments and music**

The African woman, as mother, was highly respected as the processor of life, bearing in mind that the African placed the highest premium on bearing and nurturing future generations. She was spared activities that entailed great physical energy, which could endanger or desecrate her body organs that constitute the shrine of procreation.

Overt exhibitions of strength associated with the man do not depict the sublime power of the musical arts. The effect and affect of music on humans operate in a subtle nature similar to the woman's exercise of power in the affairs of a traditional African society. As John Blacking noted, music uses people more than they think that they use music.<sup>1</sup> African philosophy about music implicates sentiments about fecundity (of the mind) and birth (of ideas that come alive in sonic and visual artistry). Music is also accorded sacred regard similar to the reverence paid to the Mother Earth Deity as a fecund and effective metaphysical force that sustains human existence. Hence musicians who create and perform executive music types conceived and deployed to transact social, religious and political mandates in African cultures, are accorded priestly regard in performance circumstances.



Modern religion and colonization devalued and destroyed African rationalization and apportionment of gender and age authorities. This was accomplished through the philosophical orientation and cultural content of modern education, which relegated African knowledge heritage to an inferior position. The following discussion of the gender issues in African musical arts thoughts, practices and discourse will derive from the above backcloth of gender structures in two worlds, and will be illustrated with reference to two African culture groups: the Pedi of South Africa and the Igbo of Nigeria.

### **Gender in *kiba* musical arts**

The *kiba* musical arts theatre of the Pedi is a viable site for discussing gender power play in the musical arts because it has the status of a Sotho royal, and therefore, national Pedi music theatre. The blocking of the stage of play could be said to reflect the Pedi worldview. The floor design is three concentric circles representing in graphic form categories and hierarchies of the Pedi worldview on authority. The circles symbolize a trinity of power, or energy domains. Constituents of the trinity must interact and bond and be unified in every individual as well as every community identity, to ensure a harmonious and psychically balanced community living.

The innermost circle is of the drummers, the womb, the Earth-force, the source and crucible of life, and therefore symbolic of the Pedi survival. Every generation of human performers will live, play the same drums, and pass on. In other words, the force of physical nature represented by the drummers is the material sustenance of the Earth force. The drums are a durable life force, a perpetuating crucible in which successive generations of performers are artistically born and nurtured as the foundation for musical arts expressions.

The middle circle is the group of men, symbolic of the active community, dancing and playing the *dinaka* pipes. Each performer plays a single-pitched pipe, the sonic individuality of which contributes a melodic element, played in a hocket technique at the appropriate point in the temporal order and thematic plan of a piece. The reed pipes have ephemeral or temporary existence, unlike the procreative permanency symbolized by drums. A reed pipe is seasonally constructed from vegetable material, used in performance as a distinctive component of a community of sound sources that constitutes a tune. It provides a melodic element, and is discarded as its sonic life expires, similar to the life energy or communal role of the male players/dancers.

The outer circle mystically protects the circles of the human community as well as the central Earth or womb of posterity, which it encloses. It is the circle of metaphysical guardians of the community, represented by the senior female citizens. The old women in the African construction of the community symbolize the immanence and interactive participation of the ordinarily intangible spirits – the supernatural forces effective as well as affective in the human sphere of existence. Old persons in tradition are accorded the revered status of spirit-humans, and are held in utmost societal regard as the embodiment of the wisdom and history of the past, the guardians of the present, and the seers of the future. They are in empathetic mental-spiritual communion with the supernatural spirits at the same time as they are in mental-mundane contact with their human progeny. The old women that form this outer circle of performers in *kiba* are inviolable, being of spirit essence. Their role is to critique the

state of affairs in the community, through interactive evaluation of an on-going performance. The women's verdict, performed in public space, is revered as a supernatural intervention that advances the positive and proactive ethos of a unified, well-ordered and progressive human community. Their artistic movements are deliberate and may not conform to the tempo or energy demands of an on-going performance, if this is too fast. Their spontaneously created texts, performance-composition style approve worthy artistic performances by the men, who represent the active human community.<sup>2</sup> In the same vein, the old women critique publicly inadequacies in other socio-political performances, of which they are ritual-moral custodians. They are the most qualified and concerned authorities in matters of standards, deviations and excellence. When the women praise a spectacular performance, the praise is not personal, directed at the individual actor *per se*. Rather it is praise for manifesting or encoding the collective ethos, wisdom, aspirations and heroism of the community. There are significant melodic and textual frameworks that guide contextual and situational elaboration or improvisation. The power of the senior woman discreetly to control the performance as well as the society's political, religious and social systems derives from the potency of sung texts, which are metaphysically directed utterances of spiritually imbued actors. In the *kiba* performance theatre then, as well as in other societal actions, the men initiate a context for societal action, and the women monitor and pronounce a verdict on its appropriateness, thereby serving as the ultimate mediators of group ethos, spiritual sustenance and the overall socio-political order.

A *kiba* performance is a site for acknowledging and accrediting a community's emerging agents of posterity whom initiation accords full status and privileges of having attained an official status as a distinctive group in society. The women use *kiba* songs to induct new societal initiates on behalf of the community, as well as discursively to transact other social, political and environmental issues. Joking relationships occur and accord with the recreational atmosphere of performances. It enhances the pervading play spirit, which is strategic for indirectly resolving serious issues publicly without generating acrimony. The women and men congregate separately during breaks for refreshments and in-group socializing. The separation of sexes in public events is strategic, but not rigid, and affords women and men an opportunity to relate separately as pressure groups to discuss matters of common interest. There is also the critical issue of dramatizing gender decorum in cognate groups.

Outside *kiba* performance settings, the strategic authority of the senior women as metaphysical mediators in political matters continues, so long as the corrective or approving criticism they render is musically transmitted, in-group action. The community power structure is such that the overt political leadership of the community or society, commonly male, makes political decisions. If such decisions are problematic, the qualified men of the community reason with the leadership to rescind or modify the problematic issue. Should they fail to influence corrective measures, the senior women step in, and deliver their verdict or critique musically. Their supra-human intervention is not ordinarily countermanded or ignored. A further instance among the Pedi of the authority of women in societal affairs basic to their higher spiritual ranking comes into play during formal marriage negotiations. The ritual authority, *rakgadi*, to initiate marriage proceedings, resides in the bride's father's sister. Without her mandatory ritual presence no male elder, even of the status of a chief, could initiate or validate the proceedings.

In contemporary practices, it is to be noticed that women play the drums in South Africa, a different gender role in musical arts when compared to other African cultures, where women do not play drums. Investigations suggest that this is an inevitable cross-over of gender roles necessitated by the recent political-historical events in South Africa. Knowledgeable respondents admit that when men were drafted to work in the mines and develop urban sites as migrant labour, the need to continue with traditional practices that sustained the group psyche and identity was not eradicated. The women who were left at home in rural homelands were compelled to contravene some traditional proscriptions in order to give continuity and advancement to such critical practices. One such role is the playing of drums. And when the men started returning to the rural settings, on visits or to relocate back home with their new township mentalities and airs, they were content to allow the new gender status quo in musical performances to remain. There are instances in contemporary practice, however, in which men take turns with women in playing the drums. Otherwise in *kiba*, it is mostly women who have been playing the drums.

### Gender and musical arts in Igbo society

A case study of gender sentiments and sexuality in the musical arts of the Igbo of Nigeria provides further insight into the gender rationalization of the musical arts thoughts and practices in Africa. The musical arts discourse in Igbo society has indigenous terminology for aspects of musical creativity, performance practice and competence, criticism, appreciation and instruments. The terms reflect indigenous philosophies and perceptions about the nature of music. A competent musician of any specialist capabilities is discussed as *onye egwu*, the music/dance person. In performance expectations and practice, every instrumentalist, singer, dancer or dramatist is normally a creative personality. Exceptional creative genius, demonstrated by a contextual musician of any gender, is discussed as *nne egwu*, 'the mother of music/creative genius', otherwise mother musician/ship.<sup>3</sup> Mothering music implies giving birth to new musical ideas or creating new versions of the known in the same vein as every biological birth produces a different impression of basic human features. 'Mother of music' has another definition as the matron of a musical arts group, usually by virtue of being a senior woman of high social regard in the community. Such a woman may not necessarily be a performing or official member of the performing group. Her role would be administrative or supervisory. At the artistic and organizational levels it is common that men may be attached to an exclusive female group as drummers/flautists and/or to provide protection, as old African societies were very particular about the safety of their women and children. The issue of security accounts for the fact that travelling music groups were normally men's groups, even though women may generally be more active in musical arts activities in a community.

Gender rationalizations are also strong in the naming and musical roles of music instruments. Some drums, flutes, and bells may be paired in an ensemble. The pair would be of different sizes, and therefore, different pitches/tones levels/tonal (harmonic) ambience. A pair, which sometimes may combine lineally to produce an ensemble theme, is named, and their structural roles discussed in terms of female and male qualities. The female instrument, *nne* (Igbo)/ *iya* (Yoruba) meaning mother, would be larger in size and deeper in tone. It normally plays the leading musical role of mother instrument, such as organizing and directing the ensemble, as well as performing a specialized extra-musical role as speech surrogate or

‘talking’ instrument.<sup>4</sup> Mother instruments are normally associated with the social attributes and organizational disposition of women. A typical African music ensemble is a metaphysical, sonic reference for a human family, mirroring the socio-political interactions in a nuclear family. The organizer and director of the activities in a nuclear human family is the mother, who strategizes verbal and gestural procedures to direct activities. The man is a political-economic pillar of the family, being the key provider of means as well as the defender of the territorial autonomy and integrity of the household. Thus, sonically and metaphorically, the metaphysical female spirit is the active leader of a musical arts ensemble, even though a man may be the human surrogate playing the instrument and leading the group.

In Igbo musicological discourse, the high, harmonic voice is a male voice, *oke olu*, and the low voice is female, *nne olu*. The two sounding together constitute the basic chordal thought in Igbo music. In three-part harmony a middle voice or pitch, termed the ‘voice in between,’ *agbalabo*, is inserted between the high (male) and the low (female) pitches. The low, female voice is the foundation of a harmonic or chordal procedure, and harnesses the other component voices or ensemble parts/roles, bearing in mind that harmonic procedure in Africa is primarily conceived lineally. This means that a thematic gestalt is harmonized horizontally as a unit, not as independent notes in a vertical thought. The fundamental theme is harmonized by matching themes that could attain independent thematic completeness in isolation but complement one another in simultaneous performance. Some ensembles – instrumental, vocal or mixed – may feature a deep-toned pulse instrument, which marks the pace of an ensemble piece. In the rationalization of ensemble structures and relationships that are socio-musically reasoned, this pulse instrument, the metaphysical ‘father,’ plays the manly role of being the structural pillar underlying and focusing the differentiated structural activities of the other themes constituting an ensemble piece. Thus, in music as interactional metaphysical entity, the sonically transacted socio-political action is controlled by the female spirit, while the male spirit provides under-grounding reference. In the transaction of societal living, high visibility in socio-political issues belongs to the man, while the woman wields the fundamental power and control.

Knowledge of the girdling philosophical and psychological rationalizations that propel the observable humanistic-societal manifestations is imperative for cognitive perception and analysis or interpretation of Africa’s indigenous systems. Published analytical or observed conclusions about Africa’s cultural practices become misleading when based on superficial perceptions of surface statistical or structural analysis of false reality. Traditional Africa practised a metaphysical science of societal and human management, in which attitude and behaviour formation was effected through psychological procedures, thereby achieving social and behavioural order. This approach prioritizes proactive disciplinary measures of deterrence rather than correction, and was driven by belief forces that coerced conformity and compliance to societal prescripts and moral order. Modern governmental systems, deriving from an age of physical science and quantifiable logic, prioritize retroactive measures relying on physical processes and legalistic regimen that are easily compromised by the human actors. Modern governance, law and order mechanisms, generate resentment, public alienation, emotional dissociation and outright rational disobedience. Traditional systems of enforcing conformity to law and order used metaphysical belief systems, that is, a psychological management of society, in which music was a key executive operative.

Fresh blood is sacrosanct in the African psyche as an active life force, and used to be central to effecting social, political and religious order. Interpersonal, inter-communal and metaphysical (between humans and effective supernatural forces) pacts sealed in blood were inviolable, and compelled compliance at the risk of severe psychosomatic afflictions, which are cited to have occurred. Blood was also an active oath force. A music instrument, which is imbued as an oath object by virtue of having been ritually activated with the psychoactive force of blood, carries a very potent energy. A false oath on such an imbued musical oath instrument is known to have killed false oath-makers. Ritual mediates and directs the potency of live blood. The metaphysical potency of women lies in their capacity to issue blood through the same body organ that gives birth to human beings. At periods of menstruation, then, women wield an extraordinarily active spirit-force, which in direct and indirect contact could overpower or weaken the potency of other metaphysically imbued objects and persons. The menstrual blood is a non-ritually tempered active force; hence its potency could be devastating. In traditional societies, stringent precautions were taken to ensure that such active force generated by a woman, who may not even be aware of it, would not inadvertently disable the active energy of potent objects and spiritized persons.

Some types and species of African drum possess effective-affective potency, and transform the psychic state of humans, often effecting possession or altered states of consciousness required for discharging critical societal or human missions. In accordance with the traditional psychological regulation of sensitive/tenuous societal issues, a metaphor had to be invented in musical practice to protect the potency of drums generally. Furthermore, African cultures held their womenfolk in such high spiritual regard that a protocol of decency, supervised by older women, was prescribed to coerce compliance with the special body decorum expected of women. A female vagabond is unthinkable, because while congenital madness is accommodated, vagrancy is the psychosomatic retribution for a socio-religious offence, which affects only a wretched or vile male. Performance on some music instruments compelled certain body comportments and performance exertions that do not comply with African notions of feminine decorum and physical action.<sup>5</sup> Thus an African woman would not sit or act suggestively in public in a manner that could excite sensual arousal, also a measure that deterred sexual laxity. Hence in an age of virtual nudity in accord with the climate, acts of rape were not known. Matters of sex were discreetly treated or metaphorically discussed in tradition.

A metaphorical imagery was further created to protect the potency of drums as a healing and transforming sonic force. The drum has human attributes: the membrane or slits symbolize or imply the female sex organ, the drumstick or hand symbolize the male. The performance intercourse gives birth to a sonic being that has potent life-energy. Playing the drum was then likened to love making, and in African cultures it is abominable for a person to 'make love' to him- or herself. Social prescription stipulates that procreative women should not play the drum. The underlying societal objective is to protect the overall human objectives that drum music accomplish in society. Pre-menstrual and post-menopausal females are free to play drums. Men were recruited as supernumerary performers to play drums for exclusively women's music groups, including the additional role of providing the women with security in public outings.

In the African conceptualizations and actualities about the musical arts as an active societal force, gender attributes and sentiments underlie and give meaning to performance, societal action and discourse. And in any case, it takes only casual observation to note that in the African traditional music milieu, women predominate in musical creativity and music making from childhood to advanced age. Considering the dominant role of the female spirit and force in the African psyche and worldview about music, we can infer that, to the traditional African, music is a metaphysical woman.

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<sup>1</sup> See John Blacking: *How Musical is Man?* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> Meki Nzewi, 'The music of staged emotions: The coordinates of movement and emotions in African music performance', in: *Musikunterricht heute*, 1999, pp. 192-203.

<sup>3</sup> See Michael Nixon, Joshua Uzoigwe & Benon Kigozi: 'Musicianship', in: *Musical Arts in Africa: Theory, Practice & Education*, eds. Anri Herbst, Meki Nzewi & Kofi Agawu. Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2003, pp. 52-73. Nixon and his co-authors argue that 'mother musicianship' may be more conceptually valid than 'master musicianship' in the African musical milieu with regard to discussing exceptional creative capability.

<sup>4</sup> Meki Nzewi: 'Acquiring knowledge of the musical arts in traditional society', in: *Musical Arts in Africa: Theory, Practice & Education*, pp. 13-37.

<sup>5</sup> Meki Nzewi, 'The music of staged emotions: The coordinates of movement and emotions in African music performance', pp. 192-203.



# PRIDE, PREJUDICE AND POWER: ON BEING A WOMAN COMPOSER IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph

I have always been somewhat ambivalent about using the term ‘woman composer’. It somehow suggests that different criteria should be applied to music composed by women. Sanctioning its use could also mean colluding with forces that are divisive and discriminatory. One rarely sees in print the term ‘woman author’ or ‘woman painter’ used as a designation. On the other hand, the term ‘woman composer’ could well be a weapon to focus attention on, and redress, the inequalities that have existed for thousands of years in the traditionally male domain of ‘The Composer’.

I was most fortunate to grow up in a very musical and very enlightened family, who made me feel that it was the most natural thing in the world for me to be composing. I cannot ever remember a time at home when attention was drawn to the fact that I was a female who was writing music. On the contrary, I was constantly encouraged and supported. Some of my role models from the past were not so fortunate, however. It must have been extremely demoralizing for the talented sisters of composers, like Nannerl Mozart and Fanny Mendelssohn, to be told that it was only acceptable for their original compositions to be published under the names of their famous brothers, as is widely documented.

At the age of six I composed little piano pieces that were published by my appreciative and cultured headmistress in the Arcadia Primary School magazine. (I spelt the title: ‘Rushen Dances’). My musical imagination was being constantly stimulated by new and exciting twentieth-century piano repertoire given to me to play by my Aunt and piano teacher, Goldie Zaidel, and it was gratifying that, with a little persuasion from her, UNISA allowed me to play several of my own compositions for the piano examinations instead of the set pieces from the syllabus. This was quite a liberated thing to do in the sixties! I recall the feeling of power when performing a newly-composed piece in front of a baffled examiner. I silently challenged him to query my notes or interpretation, given that the composer herself was playing. I also remember with frustration, however, the occasion of my being a finalist in the Overseas Licentiate Scholarship. I received a very high mark for the actual exam, but in the interview that followed, I was told outright that I was unlikely to receive the scholarship since I had plans to get married. The rationale was that I would probably not make good use of the money. I was naturally outraged, but the prize eventually went to a male violinist.

It was at Tukkies [University of Pretoria], my Alma Mater, that I was acknowledged and respected as a composer, and where I developed a great sense of pride in my vocation. In the late 1960s, Prof. Johan Potgieter, my composition teacher, helped me to believe in myself as a young composer and my first Piano Sonata of 1969 was born, as well as several worthwhile pieces of chamber music. These early works were recorded and often performed.

During my M.Mus. studies in composition at the University of Pretoria I was nurtured and nourished by the delightful Prof. Arthur Wegelin (or 'Oom Willem' as he was also known). He opened my eyes and ears to the wonders of avant-garde music with scores and recordings he brought back from Festivals in Darmstadt and Holland. I was introduced to the glorious world of György Ligeti's music, among others. It was while listening to Ligeti's works like *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures* in the Pretoria University 'diskoteek', that my determination was born to study one day with this great master, a decision that came to fruition four years later. I was accepted as one of Ligeti's three composition students at the Hochschule für Musik in Hamburg in 1974.

I think it is important to note that, although I was the only active *female* composer who was struggling to get commissions and to be performed, my male counterparts had an equally difficult time getting their works heard. Lack of interest in contemporary music and resistance to it were the symptoms of the times, and audiences were painfully small. I recall one of the first occasions when I shared a platform with Kevin Volans and Peter Klatzow. The occasion was a concert of student composers from Wits [University of the Witwatersrand], Tukkies and Potchefstroom Universities, held in the Wits Great Hall in August 1971. I think we managed to get an audience of ten people in that large auditorium.

Whilst studying in London in 1972, I received a letter from a Mr Aaron Cohen from Johannesburg, requesting my biography. He was doing research for a comprehensive international two-volume encyclopaedia on women composers. I recall being surprised that it was necessary to separate the sexes in a lexicographical project, but soon began to understand why this was important. Women composers had historically suffered from extreme exclusion and prejudice and this was a way of addressing the discrimination and neglect. Mr Cohen and I began a deep friendship that lasted over twenty years till his death in 1996. His vast collection of recordings, manuscripts, books and invaluable archival material found a home at UCLA in California, as Wits University at the time could not seem to find a place to house it. Mr Cohen gave me many excellent recordings of music by women, and to date I have the largest collection of such music in this country. He related wonderful anecdotes about his search for women composers, among one of the strangest being the story about the composer Walter Carlos (of synthesizer fame), who was apparently so determined to make it into this encyclopaedia that he took the drastic step of having a sex-change operation. He can be found in the encyclopaedia under the name of Wendy Carlos. Several men with women's names also found their way into his book. Mr Cohen expressed the hope that a petticoat would one day be put on his tombstone.

My years studying at the Royal College of Music in London and later at the 'Hochschule' in Hamburg with Ligeti were vital to my growth as a composer, yet my inspiration came from only one source: South Africa. In London I had some fascinating experiences and some rude awakenings. As a postgraduate student of piano and composition at the Royal College, I did not fraternize with the undergraduates and just went in for my lessons. There was apparently conjecture amongst these students as to what my field was (musically). I heard later that they had decided, arriving at a judgment based purely on appearance, that I must be a 'mediocre opera singer' (probably in the role of Brünnhilde!). In fact I was finding it difficult to convince my male teachers and colleagues that I was deadly serious about composition. Responses to

me ranged from patronizing flattery to downright dismissive disdain. It has to be said that attitudes in England were far worse than I ever encountered in South Africa.

As a result of this stereotyping I was determined to teach the powers that be a lesson. I composed a piece for a composition competition at the College called *Reaction* for piano, cello and percussion. I auditioned only female performers and, including myself at the piano, had a female trio to perform the work.<sup>1</sup> I was enormously thrilled to find that at the end of the evening I had won the coveted Cobbett Prize for composition for 1973. *The Star* newspaper in Johannesburg ran a story on 15 June 1973:

It was a triumph for South African women when Miss Jeanne Zaidel from Pretoria won First Prize in the Cobbett Competition for young composers at the Royal College of Music in London. Miss Zaidel was the only woman competitor and her work, *Reaction*, was described by Sir Lennox Berkeley, British composer and adjudicator, as a 'work of the utmost ingenuity and of an extremely high standard.'<sup>2</sup>

This was indeed a reactionary piece, with harsh sounds created by an erstwhile staunch Women's Libber as a reaction against the prevailing chauvinistic attitudes, and certainly its aggressive and fragmented nature could hardly have been described as 'feminine' (from time to time in my career I had been paid the dubious compliment that my music sounded 'just like that of a man'). I felt at the time that the world was still not ready to accept women composers.

One of my 'rude awakenings' came one evening when I was invited along to the pub for a drink by my lecturer in Electronic Music: he blatantly offered me a BBC film score commission in return for other favours from me. I vehemently answered: 'Doctor, *No!*' This was the first but not the last time that various men in powerful positions propositioned me in return for a composition commission. It signified for me the kind of power that *can* be wielded by both the giver and the receiver of favours.

During the 1970s in South Africa a composer was dependent on either the SABC or SAMRO for a commission. I seemed to be something of an enigma to the gentlemen in the hallowed 'Broederbond' portals of the SABC. Anton Hartman used to refer to me as the 'Joodse boeremeisie', or 'Jewish farm girl', as I was fluent in Afrikaans. The composite of my being a white Jewish woman writing distinctly African-oriented music caused some confusion in those upper echelons of arts management at the SABC.

I was always extremely well-received by the Roos family at SAMRO in those years. Gideon Roos Snr could not have been more gracious and helpful, and I never experienced any institutional discrimination. In fact, I have received regular commissions from SAMRO throughout all my composing years. I do recall one of the SAMRO composers, though, coming to me after a successful concert of my music and saying with overt sarcasm, 'And how is *Mrs* [not "Doctor"] Rudolph and her brood of children coming along?'

In 1974, I was commissioned to compose a competition piece for the SABC Music Prize. I returned to Pretoria from London to compose the piece *Three Dimensions for Piano*. An

article appeared about this commission in *The Star* on 12 March 1974 under the heading 'Young Composer Strikes a High Note':

Vivien Allen of the Pretoria Bureau interviewed this talented young South African composer about her past and future in the traditionally male field of serious music composition.

'What of future plans?' she asked.

'They definitely do not include marriage,' said Ms. Zaidel. 'There's no time and marriage is no good if you can't be yourself and follow your career.'<sup>228</sup>

Famous last words.

In May of that same year an article written by Joe Sack appeared in the *Rand Daily Mail* under the heading 'Women Call the Tune'. 'Why do male composers write so much delicate and poetic music while many women composers go in for the strong, strident stuff?', he asked. When Joe Sack interviewed Aaron Cohen about his *Encyclopaedia of Women Composers*, Mr Cohen said that he was 'very much looking forward to acquiring the recording of a new orchestral work, *Kaleidoscope*, by the highly talented young South African, Jeanne Zaidel.' He continued to say: 'If you think it's scored for sweet, muted strings, you're wrong. Eliminating strings altogether, it's a vigorous work written for a whole range of percussion instruments and a team of brass players.'<sup>4</sup> It was Mr Cohen's belief that women have a flair for powerful orchestration and martial themes.

In June 1976 I was invited by CAPAB (Cape Performing Arts Board) to be the guest composer in the series 'The Composer Speaks' in Cape Town. This was to be my conducting debut, as I was to conduct several of my own works. The performers were members of the CAPAB Opera Orchestra, as well as some from the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra. I recall initially sensing a definite resistance from the performers. Not only was the music composed by a woman, but the conductor facing them was that same woman. With sheer hard work I gained their trust and respect. The performance was excellent and characterized by a cohesive team spirit. In a pre-publicity article in the *Sunday Times* entitled 'Portrait of a Composed Composer', Len Ashton referred to 'The Fair Young Maiden with the Tender Touch' and went on to say that 'Jeanne Zaidel is a blend of talent and charm calculated to cast male chauvinist pigs into confused admiration. It is not every fair maiden who can combine modesty and formidable intellectual abilities.' His article ends with the quote: 'Not being married made it possible.'<sup>5</sup>

Said the fair maiden three months before her wedding.<sup>6</sup>

This fairly condescending approach did not really offend – it was just highly amusing. The ultimate of sensational and sexist reporting, however, appeared in *The Star* of 4 June 1976. Jaap Boekkooi wrote:

She's Glam, isn't she?! – Jeanne Zaidel, one in a handful of rare birds in South Africa. Even to her 75 Wits students Jeanne Zaidel does not look what she is – a composer! – it's difficult to imagine her in the grave company of a bewigged Bach, a frilly Mozart or a bearded Brahms.<sup>7</sup>

On 18 September 1979 a headline on the arts page of *Die Vaderland* proclaimed: 'Eerste Suid-Afrikaanse vrou kry 'n D.Mus.' ('First South African woman obtains a D.Mus.'). The article

includes a lovely cosy family photo attached of myself and my two daughters, Natalie, two years old, and baby Sara, four months old. The article asked: 'What does a person with a Doctor's degree in music look like? Middle-aged? Bald? Long beard? Wrong! Not always. The person can also be an attractive young woman.'<sup>8</sup> It seemed to fascinate reporters that I handed in my doctoral portfolio on 10 May 1979 and that my second child was born on 11 May – the very next day. A headline in the *SA Jewish Chronicle* read: 'How baby beat Ma's deadline.'<sup>9</sup> On a more serious note, I want to express my debt of gratitude to Stefans Grové; my teacher, my mentor and supervisor for my D.Mus. degree. This was a man from whom I truly learnt by example.

I do believe that being a mother of children impacted on the way I composed, enriching my work with warm life experiences and bringing out my nurturing side. We have four daughters, whom I sometimes refer to as Opus 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively.<sup>10</sup> In a 1995 article in *Lantern*, Mary Rörich wrote:

The fact that Zaidel-Rudolph is comfortable in her role as a woman does not mean, however, that her music is palpably 'feminine'; in fact, her compositional voice has a boldness and at times a confrontational element that confirms its innate virility.<sup>11</sup>

Now, as then, I take that as a compliment. Although some of the above phrases can be construed as sexist and discriminatory, the older I get, the more charming I find them. I view them as being more protective and paternal than patronizing.

The early 1980s were characterized by a burgeoning of festivals worldwide devoted exclusively to women's music. Although I was not in favour of gender segregation, I soon discovered the huge spin-offs of such festivals. The musicians hired to perform were of the highest calibre (some men were even allowed to play!). I was invited to give a paper at the First International Festival of Women in Music held in New York in March 1981.<sup>12</sup> There were over 750 delegates and it was indeed a unique occasion, and the beginning of some wonderful friendships and valuable networking. In the same year I launched the New Music Network (NMN) – a society for the promotion of twentieth-century music. I became the first Chairman (not 'chairperson') of the Society.

Journalists who wrote about me somehow seemed to be preoccupied with my pregnancies and babies. In the 'Etceteras' section of the *Fair Lady* magazine of December 1981, an article about me and the NMN began as follows: 'If prenatal influence counts for anything, the third daughter of the Rudolph household, born in September, should cry in a chromatic scale.'<sup>13</sup> We had performed a very ambitious debut programme while I was heavily pregnant.

In March 1982 one of my compositions (Five Pieces for Woodwind Quartet and Soprano)<sup>14</sup> was chosen to be performed at the week-long festival 'Donne in Musica' in Rome in the magnificent Palazzo Braschi: 62 women composers from 28 countries spanning 14 centuries were represented. Top instrumentalists gave superb performances which were recorded for television and radio. The works of women composers from past centuries, most of whom had never been published, were performed. My sponsorship for the festival came from a wonderful woman and patron of the arts, Eva Harvey, herself a composer. On my return from Italy I was interviewed by Cathy Kentridge from the *Sunday Express* of 10 October 1982 and I was quoted as angrily demanding: 'When was the last time that a woman composer was

featured in a concert programme in Johannesburg?’<sup>15</sup> I subsequently became very active in the arena of women’s music and began lecturing extensively on women composers. I became a member of the ILWC (International League of Women Composers) and am presently the African representative for the IAWM (International Association of Women in Music) based in the United States.

In 1986 I presented excerpts from my Rock Opera, *Rage in a Cage*, at a women’s festival in Israel. It was quite an eye-opener to be amongst so many women composers, and especially female conductors. I have had the privilege of having two women conductors direct orchestral pieces of mine at Women’s Day celebrations at the Linder Auditorium. Tania Leon, the Cuban conductor, interpreted my *Tempus Fugit* magnificently in 1995, and in 1998 Rita Paczian, a German conductor, conducted *At the end of the Rainbow*, a work about Noah’s great flood recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible. I was very thrilled by the critique that followed and which stated: ‘After Saturday night’s excellent performance Zaidel-Rudolph’s work can take a proud position next to its illustrious (but completely different) predecessors, Benjamin Britten and Stravinsky.’<sup>16</sup>

One of the highlights of my career as a composer in this country was the first Total Oil Composition Competition in 1986. I decided to enter and composed an orchestral work called *Tempus Fugit*. Since my music manuscript writing is not very legible, I asked someone to re-write the score in beautiful music calligraphy.<sup>17</sup> Thankfully, the competitors were to enter anonymously with only a pseudonym and not their names. I used my secondary school motto,<sup>18</sup> ‘Spes Prosit Labori’ (‘We work in hope’) and attached it to my entry. There was a gathering of most of the active South African composers in the boardroom of Total for the announcement of the results. When my pseudonym was read out, I realised with excitement that I had won the first prize. The identity of ‘Spes Prosit Labori’ was, however, met with a stunned silence on the part of the judges. One member of the panel openly admitted to me that he and the others thought they had recognised the script and were convinced that the winner was someone else, a local male composer.<sup>19</sup> Shock and disappointment registered on their faces and it was a moment I will never forget. Of course, Nadia Boulanger’s sister, Lili Boulanger, had also entered the Prix de Rome anonymously with her orchestral composition, *Helen and Faust*. At the age of nineteen she won this coveted prize, much to the horror of her male contemporary composers. The following year there was pressure from the other composers to remove the requirement of anonymity. Lili Boulanger did not win that year and died a year later. Newspaper write-ups following the Total Competition included the headline: ‘Mother of 3 wins top Competition’. I must yet see an article entitled ‘Father of 2 wins composition competition’.

In 1995 I was very honoured to be invited to be part of the Anthem Committee that was given the task of shortening and re-arranging the two South African anthems. My restructuring proposal was accepted by the Committee and I was then commissioned to write the new piano version as well as an orchestral version, which I did and for which I was paid. The English words included were also my own. I thought that being a woman in the New South Africa would count for something. However, it was widely reported in print and on radio that it was the chair of the committee, James Khumalo, who had in fact written the new version



of the anthem (which reports were, to my knowledge, never contradicted or corrected by any parties).<sup>20</sup>

In 1996 I was commissioned along with six male composers to write a section of the music for an *Oratorio for Human Rights*, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to be premièred at the Olympic Games in Atlanta that year.<sup>21</sup> I was predictably allocated the section on the 'Rights of the Mother and Child', in addition to the 'Right to Education and Protection of Intellectual Property'. I had no problem with this, but felt it might have made a more profound statement had one of the males written about the rights of 'mother and child'.

In spite of the sometimes foolish and discriminatory attitudes I have encountered, I feel enormously privileged to have grown up as a composer in South Africa. I had caring and wonderful teachers as well as the support and confidence of friends and family. I was afforded great opportunities with many commissioned works, many recordings and broadcasts, and my critics have been enormously kind to me.

I am at present composing a commissioned work for the Nqoko Women from the Eastern Cape: they are a national treasure and are unique in that they sing in multi-phonics. In this project I am doing what I love most: promoting women in music within an African context. The work, *Lifecycle*, for female choir, African bows and drums and Western ensemble of 11, was premièred in Pretoria on 5 November 2003 and was followed by a gala performance in Cape Town on 13 November.

Sir Thomas Beecham was recorded as saying that 'There are no women composers, never have been and possibly never will be.' But the ultimate put-down came from the notebook of Samuel Butler, who stated: 'If Man is the Tonic and God the Dominant, the Devil is certainly the Sub-Dominant, and woman the relative minor!' I think that these 'crotchety' old gentlemen should have a re-think as to what key and clef and time-signature they're in, to avoid making a 'bass' and 'treble' mistake.

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<sup>1</sup> The performance took place in May 1973 in the main auditorium of the Royal College of Music, London.

<sup>2</sup> 'Music Triumph for Pretoria Woman', in: *The Star*, 15 June 1973.

<sup>3</sup> Vivien Allen: 'Young Composer Strikes a High Note', in: *The Star*, (Pretoria Bureau), 12 March, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> Joe Sack: 'Women Call the Tune', in: *The Rand Daily Mail*, 29 May 1974.

<sup>5</sup> Len Ashton: 'Portrait of a Composed Composer', in: *The Sunday Times*, 6 June 1976.

<sup>6</sup> To my first husband, Dr Alvin Berman.

<sup>7</sup> Jaap Boekkooi: 'She's Glam, Isn't She?', in: *The Star*, 4 June 1976.

<sup>8</sup> 'Eerste Suid-Afrikaanse Vrou Kry 'n D.Mus.', in: *Die Vaderland*, 18 September 1979. Translated from the Afrikaans by the author.

<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Segal: 'How Baby Beat Ma's Deadline', in: *South African Jewish Chronicle*, 30 November 1979.

<sup>10</sup> Natalie, Sara, Tamar and Devora Nisi.

- <sup>11</sup> Mary Rörich: 'Flashpoints for Creation', in: *Lantern*, Winter 1995.
- <sup>12</sup> The paper was entitled 'Music in South Africa'.
- <sup>13</sup> 'Etceteras', in: *Fair Lady*, 2 December 1981.
- <sup>14</sup> The pieces are written for two flutes and two clarinets. At this performance the soprano soloist was Lilea Reyes.
- <sup>15</sup> Cathy Kentridge: 'The Sweet Sound of Success for South Africa's Jeanne', in: *The Sunday Express*, 10 October 1982.
- <sup>16</sup> Willem Scott: 'Zaidel-Rudolph's Work Can Take Its Place Proudly', in: *The Pretoria News*, 23 August 1998.
- <sup>17</sup> The person was Jonny Maritz, percussionist of the SABC Orchestra.
- <sup>18</sup> Pretoria High School for Girls.
- <sup>19</sup> The member of the panel in question was Prof. Walter Mony, and the male composer John Coulter.
- <sup>20</sup> See *The Star*, Friday 21 April 1995; *ARENA* Wits Alumni magazine, July 1995, p. 24; the claim was made on radio on the Dali Tambo Show and elsewhere at the time.
- <sup>21</sup> The other composers were Hans Roosenschoon, Peter Klatzow, Carl van Wyk, Sipho 'Hotstix' Mabuse, Surendran Reddy and Stefans Grové.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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**Sello Galane** was the founder of the Kiba Music Development & Training Programme, begun with NAC funding in 2000. A teacher by profession, Galane was the convenor of the Arts and Culture Working Team for the National Curriculum Statement for South Africa working under the Ministerial Projects Committee set up by Prof. Kader Asmal. Galane submitted his MA on Kiba at the University of Cape Town in April 2003. He has released three CDs using a concept he has coined 'Free Kiba', all on a record label he founded called KAMR. Galane has researched at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC in 1997 and at the CRDC in Paris and Nantes in 1997. He has run workshops for the National Community Theatre for Education and Development (NACTED) in the SADEC Region. He has also published poetry in the *Timbila Journal of African Poetry*. Galane currently serves as the National Co-Ordinator of Arts and Culture Curriculum Development for General Education and Training in the National Department of Education.

**Shirli Gilbert** received her D.Phil. in Modern History from the University of Oxford. She is also an accomplished pianist, and holds undergraduate and Master's degrees in Music from Oxford and the University of the Witwatersrand. Her first book, entitled *Memory's Voices: Music and the Holocaust*, will be published this year by Oxford University Press. She is currently an assistant professor at the University of Michigan.

**Stephanus Muller** was born in Pretoria in 1971 and went to school in the Karoo town of Graaff-Reinet. A graduate of the Universities of Pretoria and South Africa, as well as of Balliol College, Oxford, he teaches musicology at the University of the Free State. He has a column in the Western Cape newspaper *Die Burger* and is chairman of the Musicological Society of Southern Africa. He has written on music in South Africa and identity politics.

**Meki Nzewi** researches and publishes books and articles on African musical arts, emphasizing traditional African philosophical, psychological, theoretical and humanistic perspectives. His primary research engagement includes formulating re-orientation and advancement imperatives for the contemporary relevance of old African musical arts thoughts and practices. He is also a music-dramatist, composer, choreographer, stage director, creative writer and performer (African classical drumming developed in the Ama Dialog Foundation, Nigeria). He gives workshops on the theory and practice of African drum music as well as anti-stress drumming. He is Co-director of the Ama Dialog Foundation for the re-orientation and advancement of African arts, and President of the Pan-African Society for Musical Arts Education. He is currently researching the contemporary advancement of *Sangoma* dance aesthetics and healing music practices. Nzewi is a Professor in African Music at the University of Pretoria.

**Grant Olwage** completed his doctorate on the black reception of Victorian choralism in colonial South Africa, and has published on masculinity in Victorian church music, and on popular Victorian choralism as a Foucauldian discipline. He recently held a research fellowship at the University of Amsterdam, and is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the University of

the Witwatersrand. His interests include Victorian music and culture, black South African choralism, club culture, and film music.

**Brett Pyper** hails from Pretoria, where he began studying at the University of Pretoria as a piano and double bass student. A decision to shift his academic emphasis to musicology led him to transfer his undergraduate studies to Unisa, where he eventually completed his Bachelor's and Honours degrees, majoring in Music History and Theory of Literature. While a Unisa student, he worked as a music administrator, first as a concert organizer at the former State Theatre and later as a freelance facilitator of developmental creative music projects. In the latter capacity, he facilitated, inter alia, the six-year collaboration between the British vocal ensemble I Fagiolini and the Soweto-based SDASA Chorale as documented on the Warner Classics CD *Simunye* and featured in South Africa and abroad. A Fulbright scholarship enabled him to study for an MA in interdisciplinary studies at Emory University in Atlanta, and he has just completed his doctoral studies in ethnomusicology at New York University.

**Nishlyn Ramanna** is a jazz pianist and composer with a particular interest in syncretisms of jazz with Indian music, African music and New (Western classical) music. He is a founder member of the Indo-Afro-jazz group *Mosaic*. His research interests include South African jazz and jazz as discourse. His publications include short biographical entries on various South African jazz musicians for the *Grove Dictionary of Jazz and Jazz Musicians*, as well as a contribution to the 'South Africa' entry in the forthcoming *Encyclopaedia of Popular Musics of the World*. He is currently a lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand.

**Martina Viljoen** is a senior lecturer in musicology at the University of the Free State. She recently received an interdisciplinary doctorate involving a study of gospel rap and ideology. Her published work includes articles in the field of hymnology, musicology and the aesthetics of music. She is involved in community arts projects of the *Afrikaanse Taal en Kultuur Vereniging* (ATKV) and the South African Schools' Festivals.

**Nicol Viljoen** is an associate professor in music theory, analysis and aural training at the Music Department of the University of the Free State. His research activities are mainly in Schenkerian analysis, having published a number of articles in this regard, as well as a Ph.D. dissertation on motivic design and tonal structure in the Mazurkas of Chopin. His interest in the concept of integrated music theory pedagogy led to the introduction of such a programme at the UFS in 1996. Furthermore, he is active as a pianist, predominantly in chamber music and jazz performances, and as organist of the Anglican Cathedral in Bloemfontein. He has an additional interest in liturgical organ improvisation.

**Chris Walton** studied music at Cambridge, took his D.Phil. at Oxford, and spent 1986-1989 at Zurich University on a postgraduate scholarship. In 1989-90 he was an Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellow at Munich University, and from 1990 to 2001 was Head of the Music Division at the Zurich Central Library. He also taught music history at the Swiss Federal Technical University. His principal research area is Austro-German Romanticism, though he has published numerous books and articles on topics ranging from Swiss Renaissance music to contemporary English composers. Recent book projects include a co-authored study of

Otto and Mathilde Wesendonck. He was appointed Professor and Head of Music Department at Pretoria University in 2001. He is married with three children.

**Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph** studied at the University of Pretoria under Stefans Grové and others, and was the first woman in South Africa to obtain a doctorate in Music Composition. She also studied composition in Hamburg with György Ligeti, and piano with Adolph Hallis and John Lill at the Royal College of Music in London. Zaidel-Rudolph has received many prestigious commissions. Her works are regularly performed and broadcast at home and abroad, and she is frequently invited as guest composer and lecturer to conferences and festivals in Europe and the USA. Her oeuvre comprises over seventy works in all major genres, and many have been released on CD. Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph was commissioned to arrange and orchestrate the official South African National Anthem after the first democratic elections of 1994. She is at present Professor of Composition and Theory, and past Head of Music at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

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For many years now, the manner in which gender and sexuality impinge upon musical creativity has been a focus of mainstream debate in Europe and the USA. This book, based on the papers of a conference organized by the University of Pretoria, is nevertheless the first of its kind to tackle these issues in a specifically South African context.

How is it, for example, that a white, gay composer could during *apartheid* write cantatas glorifying the same nationalist society that deemed him to be perverse? What role did gender play in the career of the premier Afrikaner woman composer of her day, whose success was matched only by the ridicule she inspired amongst her peers? And to what extent can gendered and sexualized hierarchies be discerned in African popular and indigenous music? These and many other questions are addressed, ranging from the straight and narrow to the queer and wide. The result is a book that is invigorating, even at times uncomfortable: a frank, scholarly, full-frontal portrait of a hitherto ignored, but vital area of South African music history.



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